Victorian Recollections

VICTORIAN RECOLLECTIONS

By the same Author

WET DAYS (1879)
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VICTORIAN RECOLLECTIONS

BY

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PREFACE

THE first incentive to writing this book was the slighting way in which people, who very likely know little about the matter, are accustomed to write and talk about the Victorian era, as if everything done during that period by those whom we had been brought up to honour and respect was quite futile and absurd. Probably the same class of people will—if the earth should last so long—in the twenty-first century be disparaging and sneering at the present era, with as much or as little reason.

It is perhaps better to be a *laudator temporis acti se puero*—of which genus I consider myself quite a mild specimen—than to cast an undeserved stigma on one's ancestors. I have, at any rate, admitted the error of the Victorian statesmen in their neglect of agriculture—fully acquiesced in by our present-century rulers during the fourteen years preceding the War, which would have been ample time, given the necessary inclination and ability, to restore the land to its former prosperity.

I should be the last to belittle the immense advance in engineering and other sciences which followed on the introduction of steam. It is not

Preface

England's fault that our inventors have during the last five years used their talents rather in facilitating and rendering more horrible the slaughter of mankind than in cultivating the arts of peace. We were, of course, forced, unwillingly, to follow suit. The world's outlook would be more promising if there were good reason for hoping that—if wars between rival nations cannot be entirely averted—there might be a return to the primeval fists and clubs—with which weapons England would doubtless achieve easy victories, and at the cost of a few broken heads and black eyes.

A further incentive to writing this book was that I had recently, as is often the case with old people, been thinking a good deal about my youthful days, and it struck me that these reminiscences might, from their contrast with much which is now occurring, be found not uninteresting reading.

In this hope I may be disappointed ; but they must now take their chance. *Liberavi animam meam.*

J. A. BRIDGES.

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VICTORIAN RECOLLECTIONS

CHAPTER I

THE VICTORIAN ERA

IT has become the fashion for writers in the Press and elsewhere to allude to what they term the Victorian Era in terms of acute disparagement, as if all the happenings of that prolonged reign were utterly futile and absurd. I think these critics might have been charitable enough to remember our disadvantages. No doubt the chief motive of their sarcasm was the want of a target at which to aim the shafts of what they imagine their humour—a little of which would have served better had it provided a substitute. I was born in 1833, and remember our parish church being hung with black on the day of King William IV's funeral, and must therefore be supposed to have suffered from the blight which was about to envelop the long reign just dawning. I confess to our disadvantages; but as far as these resulted from the lack

of discoveries and inventions which were still *in nubibus* it must be allowed we were not to blame.

The introduction of steam, hitherto only known to us, or rather to our mothers, through the agency of the humble but useful kettle, made an immediate revolution in country life, and it came, as inventions and discoveries always do, at the right moment. Stage coaches, well ordered as they doubtless were, would have been unable longer to bear the strain of dealing with the increasing population, already seething with the desire to look beyond the boundary of their village, or even of their county town, and to visit one or other of the great cities of which they had heard such astonishing tales. A journey to London was getting increasingly difficult for ordinary people, from the uncertainty of being able to secure post-horses, though the rich could still manage to travel in comfort. It would sometimes be annoying to find that you had to change horses at the half-way houses which Dibdin described as 'hedge alehouses,' and at these you would see the poor horses brought out for another stage almost before they had been rubbed down after their exertions in the last. Dibdin's lines would recur painfully to the traveller :

'While the saddle-sore galls, and the spurs his sides goad,
The high-mettled racer's a hack on the road.'

Railroads were indeed a boon to these poor slaves who were driven and spurred so mercilessly to death, and if steam had done nothing more than release them from their tortures it would not have come in vain.

From post-horses to aeroplanes is a far cry. It seems only the other day that a little squire in our neighbourhood waxed indignant at the presumption of an airman who flew over his territory —his proprietory rights extending, so he urged, to the sky. We advised him to put up a wire fence to keep off trespassers. This he appeared to take quite seriously, and I think he would have taken our advice but for the rise, almost prohibitive, in the price of wire, and perhaps a suspicion that the fence might have to be rather a high one.

No doubt the introduction of steam put our engineers on their metal, and it was not very long before there were attempts at challenging the new monopoly. When I had been going to and from my school near London for a year or two by the newly-instituted South Eastern Railway instead of the four-horsed coach from Dover, I noticed, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Croydon, a number of newly-erected buildings of red brick at intervals of two or three miles, with spires which gave them quite a church-like appearance—a novelty which I was moved to inquire into. The little buildings, I learnt, were the stations on the new and rather grandly named Atmospheric

Railway. The centre of the line was occupied by an enormous tube, in which was a slit into which grease had to be inserted by hand after the passing of one of the tiny trains—an operation which no doubt accounted for the long intervals elapsing between them. The line was a very short one, and the duration of the Atmospheric Railway was not very long. I looked out for the little churches one day, and they had disappeared! The collapse, I suppose, occurred from the want of a genius sufficiently inventive to supply a mechanical substitute for the man with the pail. I wondered where the little churches had got to. They may have been bought up by some religious sect to whose views their cheerful exteriors appealed, and, if so, the competition for them was probably not very keen. They are probably remembered by very few, but a survivor here and there may still be smarting from the disappointment resulting from the unsuccessful attempt to reorganise the new railway system. It must be allowed that this was a freak which the engineering talent of the Victorian Era did not often indulge in. (I never heard any mention of the Atmospheric Railway from the day of its disappearance—about 1847—till a day or two after penning the above paragraph, when having chanced upon Eden Phillpott's tale, 'Brunel's Tower,' I found the whole story told in that favourite author's lucid style, not omitting the grease.)

Another disadvantage, to be lessened if not entirely removed by the agency of steam, was the scarcity of coal. This was bad enough for those who, like us, lived on the sea coast. How people who lived even a few miles inland got any coal at all is hard to imagine. Yet I can only recall one occasion when the shortage was really serious. Of course the supply was entirely sea-borne. Collier schooners would run up on the shelving beach near Deal Castle at high tide, to be speedily unloaded, and hurried off to sea again. As may be supposed, rough weather put an end to any arrivals of coal. There was a small coal-dealer, with whom my father did not usually deal, at Kingsdown, a tiny village on the coast two miles nearer Dover. This man occasionally had a ship-load of coal, and I remember when quite a small boy being sent on my pony to beg a ton or two, as we were quite without. The little dealer obliged us at thirty-five shillings a ton—an enormous price in those days. These collier schooners were tubby affairs, but splendid sea-boats, and they appeared to last for ever. About forty years ago, I saw a schooner, trading on the Welsh coast, on which Captain Cook had made one of his voyages, and as his last was made in 1779 this must have been a record ! To all appearance, she was still quite seaworthy.

A real grievance—one of the few which was a perpetual trouble to dwellers in the country—was

the want of a cheap postage. This, while the custom of franking lightened it for the well-to-do, made it hard, and in many cases impossible, for the poor either to send or receive letters. It was —as someone has recently written—the poor folks' letters that should have been 'franked.' I remember the delight with which the elaborate illustrated envelope was welcomed, to be shortly exchanged for the penny postage stamp. If one could only have foreseen the price to which collectors are to-day sending the superseded wrapper, what a fortune one might have made!

Another of our deprivations (of which, as we had not visualised it, we did not feel the want) was the bicycle, which has since done so much to quicken the plodding feet everywhere, and to enliven the youth of cottage and of hall—to-day, almost all the children of my village tumble out of their perambulators, so to speak, on to their bicycles. Even the velocipede, its predecessor, was only known to a select few. I used to ride to Dover occasionally to stay with a school friend, when we would seat ourselves as quickly as possible in the midst of the four enormous wheels, and commence to work the clumsy pedals up and down till bedtime. How the thing used to rattle! When we got back to school at Highgate, we were looked on with envy, and nothing was talked of but 'Leland's velocipede,' of which none of our schoolmates appeared to have heard before.

Pipes were lit by flint and steel. Matches are scarce now—1918—but I think they were scarcer with us. There was a match, called a 'Vesuvian,' which was peculiarly unsavoury. The commonest description of match was made of a long, broad slip of pine, trimmed to a point at one end, and dipped in some preparation of brimstone. I remember when the two-horsed coach from Deal to Dover stopped at the top of the hill running down to the latter town, to enable the passengers to admire the view, the driver would also call attention to an old man who was seen selling matches by the road-side, and who was mendaciously reported, owing to his blindness, to have extended the sharpening process to his fingers.

Guns were fired with flint and steel, of which a good number of sportsmen continued to avail themselves long after the invention of percussion caps. There were no breech-loading guns. The loading of 'Brown Bess'—as the military musket was called—what with biting the cartridge, ramming down the bullet, and returning the ramrod to its place, took quite a long time. Occasionally a recruit would omit the last of the series, when the militia colonel, riding in front of his regiment on parade, had to run the risk of being spitted.

Yet even our traducers must allow there were compensations. There was, at any rate, no lack of great personalities—sufficient, indeed, to preserve the national honour intact, and to hand down

a substratum for their successors to build upon and improve—and the names of those who assisted that benighted age to struggle through the darkness are not yet forgotten. To begin with, there was the Queen, who, if not a ruler of the type which had been made famous in history by queens of Egypt and elsewhere — which, indeed, our Constitution would scarcely have allowed—set an example to her subjects as wife and mother, which the majority were careful to follow. This example the new century humourists pass by with a sneer; yet it may be asked what she could have done that would have been of more service to her people.

We children had a weekly, and occasionally a more frequent, reminder that all the glory had not yet departed. On Sundays, in church, by standing on tiptoe, we could look across the aisle and into the pew where the great Duke of Wellington —then nearly worn out by the stress of his long term of duty, during which he had successfully defended the country from an attack second only to the one now merging, after four long years, into victory—was politely fixing his ear-trumpet (as the parson commenced his ascent of the three-decker) before resigning himself to what most of us allowed to be well-earned slumber. On week-days we would meet him on the Castle front, and be the proud recipients of the salute—with two fingers—which he never failed to give us in return for our childish adulation. The last time I saw

him was one Sunday, a few weeks before his death, when on his way out of church he stopped, and, leaning over the door of our pew, which was just opposite his own, made my mother a low—and, as it proved, a farewell bow.

For others there were Peel, Brougham, Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Cobden, and Bright—these last not everyone's money—the great Lord Salisbury, and others of views sufficiently varied to enable every country politician to choose a statesman to his mind.

Most of these are already forgotten, though they may have deserved to be kept in memory a little longer. The one still best remembered, who was during his lifetime less famous than two or three of his colleagues or opponents, appears to have been more or less indebted for his survival to his connection with a common wildflower, which before the alliance had not been specially popular. April 19 has long been known as 'Dizzy's day,' and even the long continuance of the War did not cause the date to be overlooked. Indeed, on the last anniversary, in 1918, more of our community than usual were sporting a primrose in their button-holes, while some old fellows had quite a bunch. Yet we are far from being a political village, and there can be but few amongst us who knew more of Lord Beaconsfield than that he was a Tory Minister a long time ago, who was reported to have had a great affection for the

primrose. Some of his admirers may have been touched by the idea of a bond of sympathy between their humble selves and a great Prime Minister. In this district, when the primrose is gemming the fields and hedgerows, you cannot be long in the company of an old or middle-aged farmer without hearing an allusion to 'Old Dizzy.' 'They'll last till the 19th, won't they?'—in a tone that almost suggests that the primrose's failure to 'stick it out' would be a misfortune for him and for agriculture. And they *do* last; though when there is an early spring and the little yellow flowers begin to appear early in February, it must be hard for them to hold out. Even away from our village those who could have heard 'Dizzy' in the House of Commons are now very few, and those who honoured him on the strength of what their fathers told them are getting middle-aged. Yet his fame is at least as secure as that of any leading statesman of the last or the present generation. He had, and still has, his enemies—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum* notwithstanding. What great man would wish to be without them? It is the Minister who hopes to cling to office by pleasing everyone, or rather by offending no one, who has no enemies and no friends, and who is forgotten, or only remembered with scorn.

The question has been asked, 'Did Disraeli really care for the primrose? Did he care a jot

for any wildflower?' The answer is not of much importance. If he did not care, how he must have laughed in his sleeve at the exuberance of some of his admirers who decided, against evidence, that a sentimental affection for a simple and common wildflower was the motive power on which a versatile and not very simple politician, whom some regarded as an inferior Macchiavelli, chiefly depended. Not that anyone has suggested that his supposed love for the primrose was due to any pretence on his part. When the idea had once taken root, it grew; and it continues to grow, and the memorial, springing freshly every year, has the advantage over those built, apparently, of more lasting materials, yet in frequent need of repair. There comes a time when economical ratepayers begin to inquire why So-and-so's statue is allowed to outlive the memory which it has been unable to foster. Yet the memory of even an eminent statesman is seldom assisted—when it is unable to keep itself alive—by recollections of his personal habits and predilections. Palmerston, in his way a great Prime Minister, was wont, if *Punch's* caricatures can be trusted, to carry a straw in his mouth. The primrose has outlasted the straw.

Gladstone is now little spoken of, though he had his enormous collars, his little bags, and his cheap claret to depend on. But these, like their author, are out of fashion. I suppose that when

a so-called great man is forgotten almost as soon as dead, it means that he was rather a great tactician than a great Minister, and that his work has been recognised as ephemeral.

It is a question whether 'Dizzy' has not done as much for his little favourite as the latter undoubtedly did for him. There are more and more primroses every year, and though the flower cannot increase in beauty, the beauty it undeniably owns is more noticed than before, and one might almost say more respected. Other spring flowers have no chance with it. It appears one spring-time where it is not particularly wanted, but it is almost always allowed to stay and multiply. This is due to 'Dizzy's' favouritism, real or supposed. There must have been something, at any rate, in the man if not in the statesman, whose regard could protect an insignificant flower which one would have thought was far beneath his notice.

We are grateful to the primrose, and wish that other deserving men—*ignoti longa nocte carent quia flore sacro*—could have hit on this way, simpler and more pleasing than a mausoleum, of keeping themselves alive. It does one good, it does the country good, to find the name of a man who did his best for England remembered and honoured long after he is dead and gone. Yet, what flower would have worked for his patron like the primrose?

For us, as yet with no taste for Ministers,

there were our mothers, modelled as closely as might be on the example of the Great Queen—a little too closely it may have seemed to the elder amongst us, yet, taken altogether, the finest and best women of any epoch in the world, and quite sufficient of themselves to save the country from ignominy, if not to endow it with glory.

If they were not always either beautiful or wise, they gained love and respect everywhere without being either. They were true and affectionate women, without pretence to any very great knowledge of literature or science. They believed every word of the Bible, and may have had good cause for feeling assured that the records of favoured mortals holding communion with God were not necessarily fables. They had little ambition, except for their children—that they should grow up good, honest men and women ; and what ambition could be more praiseworthy ? The teasing arrows of spite and meanness glanced off them as if from some invisible armour ; nor did they ever seem conscious of having been aimed at. They never ridiculed anyone, and it was only their example that made their children so often laugh at themselves. They carried out to the utmost the Christian principle of forgiving ; they only did not forgive often because it was almost impossible to make them see that anyone had injured them, and quite hopeless to induce them to think that the injury was intentional. And if the mothers had faith,

hope, and charity, surely some fragments of these virtues will have been retained by their sons.

Our mother never underwent the troubles and anxieties caused by the 'servant question.' Almost every young girl who took service with her stayed till she either got married or retired from service. To have lived in her house was a certificate of virtue and capacity. After having been away for many years, I went down with my daughters, a short time ago, to the place where I had lived in boyhood. Two of the old servants, sisters, both getting old, were living together in the little town. They found us out, and seemed at once to look on my daughters as their belongings. Of me, whom they had last seen as a schoolboy, they could not make enough. They recalled sayings of my mother's, and how she had always thought of their welfare as her own. These were by no means exceptional cases. Even now there are a few of these jewels left, and they are priceless indeed. Naturally, young girls nowadays want to get about and see the world. I am afraid they sometimes find it a poor place to wander in.

No doubt what chiefly amuses the critics of the Victorian Era is the dress then worn by women. I grant that the crinoline was absurd, the clothes generally too voluminous, and that beauty was in those days so closely veiled that it could not always even be guessed at. There is little left now to the imagination ; and this is a mistake. A *via*

media would have been to most people a more welcome settlement. The other day I was in a London motor-bus, when a stout lady, who might once have been good-looking, got in. She had very little on, and that little was arranged to display rather than to veil what she may have imagined her charms. I think most of the passengers, young women some of them, were rather offended than pleased by the exposure. In mid-Victorian days the woman would have been hooted, if she had not been put down for a figure escaped from a waxwork or a travelling show. This was a case which the *via media* could scarcely have dealt with.

CHAPTER II

SOCIETY IN THE COUNTRY

LIFE in the country, for all its lack of excitement, was yet not unhappy. It was not, indeed, till I went to Eton that I began to find the country dull when I came home for the holidays. Eton, of course, was a good deal livelier, and we used to think an 'extra week' which our patrons, from not understanding our feelings on the matter, would sometimes insist on asking for, a terrible nuisance. Dull or not, we had to make the best of it. Little country towns and villages stuck together, young and old, poor and well-to-do —except for a cantankerous old fellow here and there—and formed little societies of their own. Farmers, if rather uncouth and of little use socially, were good fellows, adepts at their trade, and with the 'character' now so seldom to be met with that writers in search of copy have to substitute inventions of their own, which are too often laborious failures. The country was fairly prosperous, and might have remained so if it had had its fair share of attention.

Society in the Country

Perhaps the greatest reproach that can be levelled at the Victorian Era is its neglect of agriculture, but this only in the latter part of the reign. The swift and astonishing growth of the big towns, and the spread of commercial in opposition to the landed interests, made the latter appear small and even negligible. There was no combination, worthy of the name, among farmers, and their loyalty prevented them from making themselves obnoxious even to a Government which neglected or harassed them, and which judicious opposition and perpetual heckling, now so well managed, might have caused to pay some attention to their needs.

The collapse was sudden; in 1867 everything had seemed prosperous; two or three years later there was scarcely anything left to preserve. The cultivation of wheat had been discontinued on the strong soils from which our best crops had hitherto been drawn. Parts of Shropshire, Essex, Sussex, and Wales were already derelict or turned into poor pasture, and there was no sign of any statesman with the required ability, or, apparently, with the wish, to stem the tide. People were contented to grow up and die with the idea that England would always be able to get her supplies of wheat from abroad. What necessity was there for growing it at home? It was, at any rate, certain that if our farmers were to grow it they must in some way be subsidised. This was considered by

the great majority to settle the matter. The people of the big towns were not sufficiently patriotic, or they were, at any rate, too shortsighted to allow themselves to be taxed for the saving of the farmers. A few schemes were suggested: granaries in which to store the wheat from overseas, and a bounty on its home cultivation. This last was talked of for some time, but the details were various and confusing ; it never came to anything, and the country, with the exception of the farmers, got used to the idea of buying by far the greatest part of our necessary food from abroad. This was a bad preparation for the trouble that was slowly but surely coming upon us; and the Kaiser, even then busy with his preparations, doubtless did not omit to notice the signs of decay in our agriculture. We were, indeed, laying ourselves open to the blow.

Still, as I said, country life was not unhappy. We managed to live contented, without greatly desiring excitements, or rushing to and fro without reason. Village ' society,' if it could be so called, made no attempt at being anything but homely; that, after all, was what we were used to. Our neighbours were neither very wise nor very witty—I find at this distant date, and with all their advantages, that there are still quite a number of silly people in the towns. We knew a few people well, instead of knowing very little of a great many. It was quite possible to get along with two or

three friends of long standing, who instead of wearying grew dearer year by year. The nice people were sometimes very nice; nor need it be supposed that because they were not fashionable they were therefore coarse or undignified. It can at least be said for them that they were never affected or snobbish. A family living in the country, with nothing but a second-rate two-horsed coach to take them on the first stage of a journey, generally preferred to stop at home, from whence it was so tiresome and expensive to get away.

For us there were the retired admirals to assist in our enlivening. We children found them very amusing. There were numbers of them, hale old fellows for the most part, some just retired from active service; others, after passing many years as post-captains—which people got to interpret as captains without a post—eventuating in some miraculous way into admirals, when they at once put up a flagstaff to overshadow the little house—as if it were a vine or fig-tree. These were careful, as far as possible, to keep up the traditions of the Service, and would roar their 'good morning' to you across the road, as if they were hailing a ship. They spent most of their time reading the newspapers or talking over naval matters in the little 'reading-room,' with its flagstaff, of course, on the sea-front, in proximity to the two rickety old bathing-machines. Two

or three of them were great friends of my father, and could be depended on to drop in for a chat or game of chess at short intervals.

I suppose we children had more sources of amusement than the generality who lived farther inland. We had no cinemas, without which every little country town would to-day think itself desolate indeed. You may see the young folk waiting impatiently outside for the show to open, and it is a pity that up to the present time it has shown few signs of developing into an educational aid. We had something better than cinemas. From the garden and from the windows of our house, which stood on high ground about half a mile from the beach, we had a good view of the Downs and of the shipping—sometimes 1000 or 1500 ships waiting for a wind. The sight, when on a change of wind they all set sail, instantaneously as it were, for their destinations, was one which the beholder will never forget, and which will never be seen again. Occasionally there would be the spectacle of ships that had run on the Goodwin Sands being towed off by the famous Deal luggers, twenty or thirty of them in a line.

The windows of the little shops facing the beach were often crowded with strange merchandise picked up from the wrecks. Once I remember a big box of gloves being washed up on shore—to the disappointment of the finders, there was not a pair in the lot ; they were all for the

right or the left hand. There was always talk of having a lighthouse on the Goodwins to supersede the old light-boats ; but no one has even yet succeeded in supplying the want permanently. An engineer, who thought he had solved the difficulty, came to stay at our house, from whence he had a good view of his new lighthouse—a slight iron erection conspicuous in its red paint. When on coming down to breakfast he looked for it one morning, he found that it had disappeared.

One of our most frequent excursions on birthdays and other great occasions was to Pegwell Bay—a wet, swampy patch of sand and sour grass lying between Ramsgate and Sandwich, where a little river, the Stour, soaked itself away into the sand. It was a barren spot, except for the sea-shells, of which we could always depend on finding a great variety. I read in yesterday's paper that this hitherto useless tract had been during the last two years or so converted into a sea-port, denominated Richboro' (from the Roman ruins of that name near Sandwich), and has for some time been used for sending munitions and food supplies over to France in big barges, thereby relieving the strain on Dover. The secret of the new port had been so well kept that it had not suffered from air raids, though the neighbouring town of Ramsgate had been attacked more than a hundred times. I think that fact will do something towards opening people's eyes to the wonders our engineers

have been doing since the commencement of the War. No doubt there are many more instances no less convincing which will be heard of now that there is no reason for keeping them secret, which gives us assurance that our engineers are no less capable of holding their own against any rivals than our soldiers and sailors have proved themselves. It looks as if the great contest for the retention of trade that will be waged after the settlement of peace will not be so one-sided as our Bolsheviks would lead us to imagine.

We children used to have what we considered a good time at the Christmas parties, of which no family of even the slightest pretentions failed to have one or more, and which were long looked forward to, and still longer held in memory. For the boys there was calf-love, with all its joys and miseries. The little houri, as she seemed, hoyden, as she may have been in reality, who first taught us to love—laugh as you will, you cynics, as indeed my sisters did—the first shy glance, the not yet utterly despised polka, the first kiss snatched hurriedly behind the curtains, or boldly, in sight of all, under the mistletoe : was there ever another kiss like it ? And to think that the dear little creature I was to have adored for ever, has been lying for about sixty years in the quiet little churchyard, to which I had scarcely given a thought till I read her name there on a tombstone a few months ago.

There was at Christmas a good deal of excitement about the school feast, the arrangements for which were generally undertaken by my mother. One year our careless Scotch cook spoilt the puddings, without which the feast would have been like *Hamlet* in the absence of the Prince of Denmark. On the night before the great day they were found to be in the fluid state, which I afterwards discovered to be *de rigueur* at American banquets. Scarcely had the damage been discovered before my mother had left her bed and betaken herself to the kitchen, where her magic art, with the assistance of the household, restored the puddings to their proper consistency, so that they were enabled to travel comfortably to the school, in the farm cart, as usual, on the morrow.

For our children's parties my mother was always inventing some novelty to vary the monotony of 'Christmas-trees.' Once she went so far as to undertake the building up, at the back of a large room on the ground floor, of a panorama of Swiss scenery, with mountains and valleys all complete, and including even a small lake. The gardener was engaged for some days, to his great surprise, carrying in the various requisites, which included barrow-loads of earth and material for the miniature forests. Vast quantities of brown paper were also required, to be moulded into peaks and valleys. The affair was a credit to all concerned, and made quite a sensation. It was indeed such a success

that it was left undisturbed for a few days after the party, when my sister's drawing master—an artist above the common—came over from Dover and took a sketch of it in water-colours, which is still in my possession.

On another occasion the governess, quite a tall young English woman, was persuaded to transform herself into a French dwarf, supposed to be travelling about the country and making a living by selling her needlework—in reality the odds and ends of the family wardrobes. She had her cards, which were handed round : ' Madame de Chambon, née dans les Landes, agée de trente-deux ans.' She stood between two tables, her supposed feet, in reality her hands, encased in a pair of slippers. A great deal of pity was wasted on the supposed dwarf, whom almost everyone present had known intimately for years, but with whom no one could converse, as of course she spoke no English. The affair passed off without the slightest suspicion being aroused, but I think some of the grown-ups were a little offended when they heard how completely they had been taken in.

One law rigorously imposed in early Victorian days, to which I greatly objected, and which has no doubt long since been abrogated, was that all the daughters of the family, whether they had any turn for music or not, must learn to sing and to play the piano. Boys were not counted ' musical,' and were therefore left without any instruction of

the sort, for which reason I have been deprived of what during a long life might have been a great source of amusement and pleasure. If I could but have had a portion of the seed that was lavished on ungrateful soil! I am not at all sure that one or two of my sisters either gained much pleasure themselves, or imparted much to others after all the trouble and money that was spent on them.

What we called 'musical evenings' were held at short intervals at the houses of our friends in the neighbourhood. These I used carefully to avoid, but when it came to our turn to do the entertaining, I was forced to put in an appearance. A girl used to figure at these 'evenings' whom I might have adored if it had not been for 'Annie Laurie.' How often did I almost wish 'to lay me down an' dee' when she obliged the company with what was then a too familiar song! At these entertainments, girls without a grain of music in their souls would run their practised fingers up and down the keys, when they might and should have been doing useful work with them in other directions. Of course they got their meed of praise, good and bad alike, and the latter got very likely to fancy they were something out of the common, and went on entertaining village audiences of several generations to quite a ripe age.

Perhaps one of the reasons of our comparative

happiness was that there was no talk about 'woman's rights,' or even about her wrongs. I don't mean as to such matters as a bricklayer's wife being beaten by her husband—that would be regrettable, no doubt, but will still occur as long as women marry bricklayers or others who don't know how women should be treated. I cannot recall any discontent with the position occupied by women, and this was certainly not owing to any want of spirit or energy on their part. My recollection is that while women were supreme in everything connected with the home, the grey mare was frequently the better horse in matters supposed to appertain to males. I don't think it entered women's heads in those days that there were not matters which men were best fitted to manage, as there were many things with which the latter would not have dreamt of interfering. It was certainly not the Victorian Era that started claiming equality with males. It strikes one as droll and a little ungenerous that the claim should have been made at the close of the Great War, in which millions of our soldiers and sailors have died heroes' deaths in France and other countries to save our women from the horrors which the Huns would certainly have inflicted on them had they been successful. Precedence on many points has readily been granted, and indeed has never been disputed, but to claim absolute equality everywhere seems going too far.

Propositions likely to have an important outcome should be worked out to their probable or possible issue before being adopted. If women, being in the majority of voters, choose to elect themselves as Premiers, Judges, Commanders-in-Chief, Admirals of the Fleet, and other important offices, would the state of this Empire be the better or the worse for the change?

But whatever happens, women will still be women, and men men. It appears impossible for women to renounce what were till lately considered her chief duties, and which it was supposed (wrongly, it now appears) that a large proportion did not greatly object to. But the attempt to carry out these old-fashioned and discredited duties to the home, together with the new political engagements they have so joyfully accepted, may mean a failure in both. It is to be hoped that only a small number, and these with exceptional capacity and—it must be added—exceptional deficiencies, will attempt the combination. I am not sure that I believe all women to be possible Portias. Even so, there might be too much of a good thing. There are, at any rate, two matters in which they may be able to please their admirers without, I trust, doing much violence to their new political aspirations. They might relinquish—in the few cases in which it has found a footing—the habit, when smoking cigarettes, of propelling the smoke through the nose, and, at any rate

during the coal famine, they might give up poking the fire from the top.

Even an apologist of the Victorian Era must regretfully allow that up to the middle of the last century, and even later, a great part of the population of the United Kingdom was far too much addicted to the use of alcohol. In the absence of light wines, vast quantities of port were drunk by people whom one would have expected to see quenching their thirst with ale. At the bars of hotels, which were crowded by farmers on market days, port was the favourite drink. It must be allowed that farmers had some excuse for their weekly orgy. A week's hard work, with no companionship but that of their farm hands, caused them to welcome the relaxation of market days. But the true port-wine drinker was not so easily satisfied. In those days the port-wine complexion, now so seldom seen, competed almost everywhere with the wholesome English colour. Anyone with a fairly large acquaintance among country magnates would be able to decide, without much hesitation, whether the flabby hand he had just shaken was that of a one- or a two-bottle man. Terrible as it may sound, there were even a few three-bottle men—that is, men who persisted in drinking three bottles of port at a sitting! One would have thought that no constitution would have stood it, but they continued the practice for a long time, and then died of old age like other

people. I was only once a spectator of this accomplishment. The curate of a neighbouring parish, who was a friend of my father, called one day on the latter to ask him, as a great favour, to invite a relation who was staying with him to dinner. The guest was an old squire, bearing a well-known name, and one of the last of the three-bottle men. He had come down in the world, as might have been expected, but still managed to get his quantum. A difficulty had now arisen. Said the curate, 'He has cleared out my cellar.' I feel sure it was the curate's idea that everything possible should be done rather than allow his friend to go without what had become almost a necessity. My father, I imagine from curiosity, acceded. I was home from Eton, and paid special attention to the performance, which the old fellow accomplished without turning a hair, walking afterwards without difficulty into the drawing-room, where he astonished my mother by giving her a recipe for a draught to be taken in the morning after imbibing too much good liquor.

Many of the farmers in a county where I lived for some years confined their potations entirely to port. A neighbour, farming his own land of three or four hundred acres, used to begin drinking port about eleven o'clock in the morning, and would keep at it all day, and never without a friend to accompany him, so that he was no

doubt the means of spreading the port-wine habit over some miles of country. At his death he owed a local wine merchant £400.

Cider, considered by some to be a non-intoxicant, was seldom bought or sold. The best hogsheads were reserved for the farmer and grower, while the labourers consumed the worse, till they were bent double with rheumatism. On some farms the allowance to the men in harvest time was a gallon every load that came into the rickyard ; but they could have as much more as they liked. At this rate a hogshead did not last long. Some farmers would make from fifty to a hundred hogsheads, and these must be emptied, or there would be no barrels ready for the next year's crop of cider.

For many years the number of men who drank to excess has been decreasing. For one thing there has been a spread of education which causes drunken men to be looked upon as fools and nuisances. It must not be supposed that the three-bottle men got drunk. Then there is the fact that constitutions are not so strong as they used to be. Recently, of course, there has been a scarcity of liquor, but there are still plenty of people who manage to get more than is good for them. Not that there is at present, or likely to be in the future, any need for a prohibition measure, nor should a set of men who have discovered that beer and spirits disagree with them

be allowed to deprive others of a moderate amount of either. 'The trade' is a lawful trade, and has certain uses in addition to brewing and distilling, though these are always minimised by teetotal opponents.

The Maine liquor law was not such a success that we should wish to copy it. There was a man who advertised a wonderful striped pig, which was kept in a cellar where it was only allowed to be visited by one person at a time. 'Your pig is a fraud,' said one of the visitors on returning, 'and you are a rascal!' 'Very sorry you don't like my pig,' the showman would respond; 'allow me to offer you a drink.'

During the Crimean War soldiers and sailors on foreign service used to be called up one by one to drink a more or less compulsory ration of rum once in the twenty-four hours. Anyone objecting to the custom was allowed to pass it behind his back to a friend, with the makings of a three-bottle man, who would relieve him of the disagreeable duty. It should be remembered that there are old people, and some who are not old, who in this climate of ours are professionally advised to take a moderate amount of alcohol.

Many people are of opinion that a country that stands in need of a prohibition law is not worth legislating for at all.

CHAPTER III

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE LAST CENTURY

IF the children of to-day are sometimes inclined, as is very likely the case, to be dissatisfied with the mental pabulum provided for them, it may comfort them to know that their literary advantages are a great improvement on those enjoyed by their youthful ancestors sixty or seventy years ago. In those days, writers or draughtsmen who undertook to cater for children were not expected to display any very striking amount of talent. Certainly there was Lear's 'Book of Nonsense,' which was and still is my delight; but I have heard on good authority that the present race of children think it foolish and unworthy of their attention. We had, of course, our nursery rhymes, 'Robin and Richard,' and the rest. In some of these there was a touch of clumsy wit, which makes me laugh even now when I recall them. Nowadays, I should imagine children are quite capable of making their own nursery rhymes, supposing that they required any, which is absurd. Harmless as ours appeared,

they were not permitted to reach us without being Bowdlerised. In those days everything got Bowdlerised sooner or later, while now it is the fashion to print a good deal of matter that the Victorian Era would have blushed at.

One of my earliest recollections is of being taken with a family party to a neighbouring town on my birthday, and there invited to make choice of a present. I must have had some latent literary taste, for I chose a book of nursery rhymes. This was duly purchased, but the presentation was deferred for a day or two, the interval being spent by someone—probably the governess—in carefully erasing all the words that could to the most sensitive mind suggest the slightest hint of vulgarity. Of these there appeared to be such a number, that very little of my new book remained legible, and so thoroughly was the work of obliteration performed, that the most careful scrutiny did not avail to discover the identity of the 'missing word,' except in the few cases where it was arrived at through the medium of the word it should have rhymed with. This we thought was going a little too far.

When we had outgrown—it is to be hoped without much contamination—our nursery rhymes, there were plenty of people to cater for us, but it would have been considered little short of a crime to offer us amusement entirely divorced from instruction. What we should have thought of

'Alice in Wonderland' I cannot imagine, but I feel sure our seniors would have considered it unfit for us, or rather, perhaps, that something inferior would have served the purpose equally well, if not better. I had an idea myself, on Alice's appearance, that she was a little above the rising generation—though this, of course, claims to be sharper than we had been—but I have been informed that it is immensely popular with such of the agricultural labourers' children as are fortunate enough to get a sight of it. Genius had not in our day hit on the happy idea of stooping to conquer the children. There was no one who could or would have written for them the 'Just so' stories, or given them such charming peeps into history as they can now enjoy in the pages of 'Puck of Pook's Hill.' It seems that, as writers were formerly content to dedicate their rubbish to the young, so they now reserve it for the grown-ups, many of whom accept the offering with equanimity if not with gratitude. Yet what our literature lacked in quality was made up to us in quantity. For our behoof on Sundays and weekdays, Messrs. Crossman, Magnall & Co. asked sacred and profane riddles, to which they were so obliging as to supply answers. To the query in the former as to why Ash Wednesday was so called, the reply was appended: 'Because the ancient Christians used on that day to sprinkle ashes on their heads, or sit in

embers or ashes.' We hoped they preferred the latter.

Our literature was divided into two parts, sacred and profane. For week-days the elder among us had 'Elegant Extracts,' in two big volumes of prose and poetry. We cared little for the former; the volume containing poetry was greatly enjoyed. Scarcely any poet who had attained even minor distinction in his day was omitted, and the extracts from Shakespeare included all the best-known and oft-quoted passages. Here, too, quite a number of forgotten, or nearly forgotten poets found what was to be an escape, if not a very complimentary one, from complete oblivion. Cotton rests here with his 'Visions'; and Young, who has still some admirers and ought to have more; Dryden, his 'Religio laici' with the versification very rude, but the matter fine and quite above us children; Thomson, quite forgotten, with Churchill, 'the comet of a season'; Collins, Crabbe, Gray—I once got half a crown from my father for repeating the 'Elegy' without a mistake—and others too numerous to mention.

For week-day prose we had 'Robinson Crusoe,' which is not a children's book; the priggish 'Sandford and Merton'; 'Parents' Assistant'; Miss Edgeworth's tales—these must still have some measure of popularity, Simple Susan's advice to 'take a spoon pig' being to some extent a

household word ; ' Evenings at Home '—good of its kind ; and ' Peter Parley's Annual,' which was a familiar present at Christmas. I forget for how long the yearly instalment of ' The Adventures of Neddy Bray ' continued its course, but it never lost its interest for us, though I believe ' Peter Parley ' was poor stuff, and children, nowadays, would fail to be excited over the long-deferred and commonplace adventures of a donkey.

We were fortunate in not being entirely dependent on outsiders for our literature. We had our own paper, entitled the . . . . *News*, which came out at irregular intervals, and took special note of such local occurrences as could be made by a stretch of youthful imagination to present a ridiculous side. This test it was found that the majority of village happenings were enabled to pass without much difficulty. Since the circulation of the paper was restricted to members of our family, it could not give offence to any of the doubtless worthy but rather dull people who figured in its pages ; while it was a great source of amusement to the Editor and his contributors. Even my father, while objecting to our ' making fun ' of our neighbours, generally ended by laughing. In its pages all members of the family, infants excepted, tried their 'prentice hands, not infrequently in verse, and it is possible that one or two of us were warned by the failure of these early attempts to turn their attention in good time

to some other accomplishment or industry in which they were more fitted to shine. I should like to read the . . . . *News* again, and see from its hand-written pages—typewriters were not yet in general use—how far the promise of the youthful contributors was fulfilled or disappointed. But, as far as I am aware, no copy of this precious periodical is in existence. Especially should I like to read again the verses contributed by a younger brother, who never, to my knowledge, wrote another line for publication, and which I am unable to recall in their entirety. The subject of this poem, so to call it, was a black girl—where he found her I can't imagine—and the last lines ran thus :—

> 'Though my poor Susannah's as ugly as sin,
> Yet she's got a kindly heart within.'

I was the privileged possessor of a 'Comic Latin Grammar,' before being introduced to the serious one. It was sent by my grandfather as part—and the best part—of a hamper of game, and for many years it smelt very high, as it probably does still, one of its *compagnons de voyage* having been a hare that was a little too long on the cross-country journey from Suffolk to Kent, which in those days, before railroads, took a considerable time. The 'Comic Latin Grammar' was an exception to the general rule of children's book of that date, and there was no lack of humour

either in the letterpress or the accompanying illustrations. I took it to London a year or two ago to be re-bound, and asked the bookbinder (and bookseller) what it was worth, expecting him to say five pounds or so. To my disgust, he said that if I wanted any more he could supply me, as he had about forty on his shelves. I had never seen any copy but my own, and I am not sure that I believed him. Booksellers (and buyers) will never allow that what you have is of any value.

Chief among the books reserved for Sunday reading was the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' with its funny little engravings—it would surprise me very much to see a 'young person' reading it now, though old folk will continue to look into it occasionally from old associations; Samuel Wilberforce's 'Agathos,' 'The Spring Morning,' and other allegories, for which Bunyan no doubt supplied the inspiration. We spent Sunday evening reading or reciting sacred poetry, of which we had numerous collections, each of them with some arresting favourites. Indeed, a book of sacred poetry was quite an acceptable present on one of our numerous birthdays, though one or two of us may have been more inclined to profanity. When 'The Assyrian came down,' he also brought down the house. It is strange that Byron and Moore should have cared to write sacred poetry; stranger still that they succeeded so well, since neither of them was eminently pious.

But they had the gift, given to few, of partaking 'all passions as they pass,' without which a poet should hardly expect to make more than a bare living. A good many poets, from Tennyson downwards, have since tried their hands at this branch of poetry, but with only occasional success. Moreover, their sacred emanations have generally been so few, compared with their profane ones, as to suggest that a large spoonful of jam was, in their opinion, required to make the powder go down. Five or six of us would crowd round the piano, and sing hymns till bedtime. I can't imagine the children of the present century doing so. No doubt we clearly saw the difference between hymns and sacred poetry.

Hymns were the one thing in which children, fifty years ago, were in as good a position as the present run of youngsters. One does not hear of many new hymns nowadays ; which looks as if the taste for hymns, like that for sacred poetry, was dying out. Every now and then some Church dignitary is proclaimed, with a flourish of trumpets, the writer of a wonderful new hymn. When the noise of the trumpets dies down, the new hymn dies too. Probably it was written to order, in which case it could scarcely help being a failure —like some of the poems on the War or on the Kaiser's more startling murders. Some of the hymns of my childhood were bad. They are bad still, and indeed they are the same hymns. But people,

who are supposed to be more intellectual than their grandfathers, go on singing them as if they liked them. We children had the sense to stick to the good ones.

I am afraid the idea is prevalent that anyone who feels 'goody-goody' can write a hymn, and that when he has overcome the difficulty of finding a rhyme to 'sweet,' his work is half done. In truth, exceptional qualities are demanded of the man who would write a good hymn. He should be something more, and perhaps something less, than a mere poet. Keble, no doubt, was something more, but then he can hardly be said to have been a poet. In addition to having poetical feeling and the power of expressing it, the writer of hymns should be able and willing to keep his talent in subjection, lest, like the greedy actor, it should force itself upon and monopolise the attention of the audience. He should also have or be able to simulate the deepest love for, and, as far as possible, understanding of religion. The poet's art should be limited to preventing religious ideas from appearing in a rude or elementary garb, while taking care not to direct attention to the clothes. The religious feeling, or knowledge, should be tempered with a certain vagueness—as of a picture hinting at beauties seen dimly through a mist—lest the writer fall into the error of saying too much on a subject of which so little is known and succeed only in evolving a sort of

metrical Athanasian Creed. These qualities, which include, in a true poet, a certain amount of self-effacement, are not so common but that plenty of people have not feared to tread the path of hymn writer without them. I said 'a true poet,' since there are minor poets in plenty who would, no doubt, if honours and rewards were attached to the role, be quite ready to turn their attention to hymn-writing. And the majority of these might be trusted not to offend by too much display of poetical art, though that is quite another thing to the exercising, by one who really possesses it, of self-restraint and self-denial. It would be a good thing to discontinue the use of these objectionable hymns till a little good taste, some attention to metre, and some knowledge of the meaning of words has made them more sensible and harmonious, and less of a careless and meaningless insult to the Being they are intended to propitiate.

CHAPTER IV

AT SCHOOL IN FRANCE

I LIVED, during my boyhood, within sight of the coast of France, and had occasionally seen from our house, in a mirage, people walking on their heads on Calais Pier. It is strange how ignorant the great majority of Englishmen used to be about their nearest neighbours, whom we despised without knowing why. And now so many of our countrymen, who never expected to catch even a distant glimpse of her shores, have crossed that narrow channel never to return.

I was an exception to the generality, in that I was at school in France for some time before making the acquaintance of any English pedagogue. I was about eight years old when, in the early 'forties, our family started from Boulogne for a prolonged trip on the Continent. The cavalcade consisted of two carriages drawn by seven or eight horses—the first containing my father and mother, and the second two nurses and quite a lot of young children. We had also a courier, Michel, a very fine young Frenchman,

who sometimes rode ahead, with a great jingling of bells, to arrange about the horses, and at other times sat with me in the rumble of the second carriage. I made great friends with him from the first, and soon found that if I wanted to learn French he was still more bent on learning English. No sooner had I taught him a few sentences than he began, to my intense delight, to make love to the more elderly of the two nurses, neglecting her younger and better-looking companion. But for all his youth and good looks he could make no impression on her, even when he followed us back to England.

We stopped a few days in Paris, which we soon left for Bagnères-de-Bigorre. Arrived there, I was at once packed off to school—I suppose to get me out of the way. The head master, or whatever he called himself, spoke no English, and I knew nothing of French, and should have had a bad time but for the fact that the son of the people in whose house we were living had picked up a little English, and looked after me in his spare moments. I used to leave home after breakfast, and was supposed to dine at the school. Instead, I used to watch the others dining. The meal, generally greasy-looking soup with a few beans—*rari nantes*—in it, was so unappetising that I soon gave up all thought of eating anything until I got home, faint with hunger, in the evening. Sometimes in the afternoon, I went for a long walk

into the beautiful country with the other boys, which I should doubtless have enjoyed had I been a little less empty.

I got on better with my French than might have been expected. No doubt the French disliked the English in those days, Waterloo being still an unpleasant memory. I was fairly well treated—rather, perhaps, like a strange animal that it would have been safer to keep in a cage. My recollections of Bagnères are, first and foremost, the soup; then the Pic du Midi, as seen from the Eau ferrigeneuse (a little temple in the woods to which visitors resorted to drink the waters), and an unfortunate vulture chained to a wall opposite the entrance to the school, which was doubtless recalled a few years later, when I came across the less lethargic fowl in Prometheus Vinctus. I also remember M. Jabot, a fat, bald, little man who gave my elder sister lessons in drawing, and who I am sure was possessed of exceptional talent. He used to show us marvellous landscapes in pen and ink; but even more notable was the twang of his *bien* when he intended it—which was very seldom—to convey approval.

Leaving Bagnères, we removed to Nice. Looking at the map it seems strange that we could have posted such a distance, but except by diligence there was no other way of travelling. Certainly, we seemed always to be galloping, or we should never have got so far. At Nice we took a pretty

house outside the town. It was approached by a drive lined by rose-trees, and surrounded by a large plantation of orange-trees. Nice was then in Italy, the little river Var being the boundary between the two countries—a fact advertised by a rather dilapidated wooden signpost in the centre of the bridge, as we still see the boundary between two counties proclaimed in England.

In a few days I was at school again: this time at quite a superior establishment, the École de Commerce, at the far end of the Champs de Mars —a big gravelled square, used, I suppose, for drilling troops, though I never saw any there. Here there were two more English boys, and the youthful Italians, having no doubt heard of *le boxe*, thought it a good joke to set us to fight one another. It was Italian now instead of French, and as hard as ever to get to understand anything, so I was left once more to my own devices. I wandered about the place during school hours ; once, I remember, I opened a door, and, looking in, saw all the boys kneeling at their devotions, and fled precipitately. I took my dinner with me now, so had no more pangs of hunger to endure, though there was some jealousy aroused when my basket disclosed a delicacy such as a remnant of cold turkey. Somehow, I got into touch with the professor of English, a charming little middle-aged Frenchman, and after that I had quite a good time. Like M. Jabot, he stands out from the

rest of the crowd, in his black blouse, his dark face marked with smallpox. He let me sit in his room not only when he was there to keep me company, but when he was engaged elsewhere, and lent me some of his English books, of which he had quite a store. It was here that I first read 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' and, aged eight or nine—think of it!—'Tom Jones.' Twenty years later, when I read the latter again, I recalled my studies in little M. Astier's chamber. He became quite a friend of the family, and used frequently to visit us on holidays. He taught us lots of French riddles and wonderful 'magic squares,' of which one or other of us has still, no doubt, preserved a specimen or two. Going home by myself in the dark evenings was not very pleasant, as our house was far away on the other side of the town. Some queen or other—I had never sufficient curiosity to inquire which—was contemplating a visit to the 'Palace,' and the roadway over the bridge was being repaired in her honour, so I was for some time obliged to use the footpath when crossing it. This I had hitherto avoided, as it was always occupied by a villainous crew of beggars, who sat with their feet in the roadway. They were mostly blind, or, rather, pretended to be, for they could see quite well enough to grab at me as I ran past, and once or twice I thought I was done for. M. Astier would sometimes see me safe through the town,

and never without treating me to a glass of *eau sucré*.

It was at this school that I had my first introduction to sport. The boys were awful gamblers —a prevision, I suppose, of Monte Carlo. The medium for speculation was marbles. There were games to suit all tastes. If you were of a timid disposition you could limit your gains or losses to a dozen or so ; if bolder, you might eventuate into quite a little capitalist. I suppose I belonged to the latter class, for I remember surprising my people by appearing one evening with an enormous bag full of marbles. Generally it was the other way about, when I was at my wit's end to get together a few sous wherewith to recommence business.

We gave up Nice after a prolonged stay, and betook ourselves home again—carriages, nurses, courier, and all complete. My recollections of Nice, apart from the school, are rather hazy. Nice is no doubt a very different place now. It must have been very quiet in those days. My chief amusement on holidays was pelting old Dominic, the barefooted gardener, with rotten oranges. I never saw signs in the neighbourhood of any farming, though there were little square-tiled floors near the sea front for treading out corn. How strange to me was the lifeless sea, always calm and sunny, without even a boat, and nothing but a few oranges floating on it, after the stormy

Kentish coast, with its hundreds of sailing-ships all waiting for a wind!

Apart from Bagnères and Nice, I have a few stray recollections of our trip. I suppose there must have been some English folk making the grand tour, but I cannot remember meeting more than three or four during our stay in France. Except in the evenings, I never spoke or heard a word of any language except French. That is one way, and not a very bad one, to learn a language. I remember the immense flocks of goats at Roquefort, the shrill cries of despair when on reaching our stopping-place for the night someone would rush out to catch the chicken for our supper, and the ducks promenading in quite stately fashion after they had been decapitated—like Charles I. in the riddle; the people walking on stilts in Les Landes, afterwards recalled by Marriot's 'Peter Simple'; the paved roads, on which we were shaken to pieces for days which seemed years; Michel stopping the carriage for a minute or two while he dived into the vineyard adjoining the road, to return with an armful of splendid grapes for which he had paid a few sous; the Pond du Gard, where Dumas located the meeting between Abbé Busoni and Caderouse—the author mentions wild fig-trees in the neighbourhood of the *auberge*, and I well remember leaving the carriage and scrambling about on the stony banks to gather some. I have never seen

a wild fig-tree since. Then there was the fat French boy in the Paris hotel, who was twice my size, and wanted me to fight him—or said he did—and who almost persuaded me to have a go.

Only once since that time have I set foot in France, and that was during the Exhibition of 1862. A Salop friend and I took rooms in Batignolles, and engaged a connection of the former, a teacher of English, to show us about. We should have done better to choose another time if we wished to see anything of French manners and customs. We felt in honour bound to pay occasional visits to the Exhibition, which both of us considered a bore, yet we managed to see something of Paris. After breakfast our little guide would remark : 'Now I am going to show you a bit of old Paris.' It always happened that adjoining the bit of old Paris was an equally ancient wine-shop, which our friend would never permit us to pass unvisited. I had had an idea that these bits were getting scarce, as Housman was then reconstructing the city with a view to the prevention of barricades ; but there must have been a good many left. At any rate there were a good number of wine-shops. By the end of our trip the whites of the eyes of our little guide were quite red, showing that he was filled to the brim with claret.

We saw the Emperor Napoleon several times,

generally on foot, when his personality was not very taking. His legs were too short, and his eyes decidedly fishy. Even on horseback he did not come up to one's idea of an Emperor. But he was a maker of history such as it was, and the means of providing Germany with a truly enjoyable feast, since when she has always been craving another. I hope that now she has had one that will suffice her for a long time.

We had cause to remember crossing the Channel on our way home. Five hours and a half from Calais to Dover! We got to London at six A.M. on Sunday morning, cold, miserable, and soaked through, as we stayed on deck throughout, not daring to trust ourselves below. We stayed two or three days in town before we felt equal to facing the journey home. It may have had something to do with our little guide and his bits of old Paris. I remember that after a meal of devilled whitebait, washed down with champagne, we went for a walk in Kensington Gardens, and I came near murdering my friend when he insisted on my looking at his tongue. But for that passage I should never have known the real meaning of sea-sickness, though I have crossed the Atlantic several times, and spent three stormy days in Biscay's Bay. And now it seems that we are to have a Channel tunnel after the War. With all my heart, if it will please our French friends. But surely a pleasure is the more valued

when arrived at through a little or even a good deal of unpleasantness.

There were formerly numerous difficulties to be surmounted by travellers who strayed out of the beaten track, and it seems a pity that a Channel tunnel should be called in to remove the last and most deterrent. It is surely better that people who cannot stand sea-sickness should stop ashore than that real travellers should be brought down to the dead level. Real 'travellers' don't want to travel with the ruck.

When I was a boy I used to take a friend, who was staying with me and wanted amusing, for the seven miles' drive from our house to Dover, where we would stroll down to the little old pier, now high and dry, at the base of the new Harbour of Refuge, and watch the Frenchmen land after a boisterous passage on one of the small paddle-boats then plying between the two countries. It was impossible to imagine that the yellow, ghastly-looking men who crawled on shore could ever be invaders to be feared. Certainly in those days there were three castles—since reduced to two—built by Henry VIII, not to mention the towers of Julius on the hill near the harbour to protect our shores.

It must be allowed that any invasion of our country by our neighbours on the other side of the Channel is likely to be of a more friendly character than that contemplated by Napoleon.

CHAPTER V

A HIGHGATE SCHOOL

IT was not until some months after our return from France that I went to school again. I was packed off to Dover one morning in our carriage, then put outside a four-horsed coach for London, where I waited half an hour in the coffee-room of a gloomy inn, till someone, whom I afterwards found was my new head-master's footman, called for me, and took me off to Highgate in a hackney coach. I think if I had known the sort of place I was going to I should have started off home again on the Dover Road, like David Copperfield. I should think I was about David's age, and I had the advantage of him in that there was no thief to rob me of my little store of pocket money, so that I might have arrived at the end of my journey without even the loss of my 'little veskit.' Having had quite a long time for consideration, I fear I must allow that the Victorian Era, while scarcely accountable for some of its failings, cannot shake off responsibility for the great number of bad schools, or rather of bad

schoolmasters, which were allowed to flourish throughout the country. Charles Dickens opened people's eyes to what was going on. Squeers may have been an exaggeration, but there was Creakle, who, though in a higher line of business, was almost as bad. Evidently in those days there were numbers of cowardly brutes in different classes, high and low, who could find no safer vent for their cruelty than by turning schoolmaster. Some of these, if they could have restrained their tempers, would have made good schoolmasters, but a good temper is the one thing necessary in dealing with boys. A man who knows that he cannot control his temper, should adjure schoolkeeping; but there may be a few yet who find in thrashing boys their chief if not their only joy.

I have never understood why I was sent to such a place. It was one hundred miles away from home, and there were plenty of schools kept by humane, or fairly humane masters—at least, I should suppose so—within twenty miles. My father was a kind and worthy man, but he probably knew little about schools, and thought one very like another. I may have had the same idea, for which reason very likely it never came into my head to tell the secrets of my prison-house, which I am sure would have shocked him exceedingly. It was all in the day's work, and I tried to grin and bear it. The bearing after a time became fairly easy, but the grinning was another matter.

The school was a large one, originally intended for the education of the poorer classes—of whom a number still attended as day boys ; I remember two red-haired, freckled boys from the ' Mother Red Cap,' a famous public-house a little farther down the hill towards London — but chiefly diverted to the sons of the well-to-do, for whose accommodation there were quite a number of boarding-houses. I was an infant of ten years, and, being considered too young to be admitted to one of these establishments, I was sent to the head-master's house as a private pupil. There I enjoyed the society of two young men—one of whom had been expelled from Sandhurst, while the other was a young baronet, about twenty years old, of dissolute habits—on whom their friends may have fondly hoped the Doctor's special methods would have a good effect. The latter was an evil-tempered brute, who should never have been allowed to have the charge of boys' bodies, much less of their souls. I was called ' the child ' ; the young men did not bully me, but they would have been bad influences had not my youth and innocence prevented them from harming me. The Doctor, though he had his eye on me, kept his hands off, as a butcher might do in the case of a calf he judged too immature for profitable slaughter. Looking back, I seem to see his mouth watering as he watched me growing chubbier and chubbier. I can't remember that

I learnt anything at all at this period. My only friends were the Doctor's sister, a frightened old maid, who was also stone deaf, and the footman who had brought me from the London inn, and who, in his leisure moments, condescended to amuse me.

Fisher, as he was called, was by way of a humorist. He would take me on his knee and tell me stories. I only remember one of these—I suppose it was the most striking. It concerned a young woman who had a silver arm—an echo, perhaps, of Miss Kilmansegg and her precious leg—of which, after her death, her lover possessed himself by disenterment. She visited him one night to upbraid him, when he was shocked at her ghastly appearance.

'Where,' he inquired, 'are those beautiful rosy cheeks that you had?'

'All mouldered into dust.'

'Where are those lovely blue eyes of yours?'

'All mouldered into dust.'

'Where is that fine silver arm that you had?'

Fisher would catch, shake me violently, and shout into my ear, 'You've got it!'

After some time as private pupil, I was admitted to one of the boarding-houses, when the Doctor began at once to take notice of me. Without being too particular, he preferred a fat boy to a lean one. I happened, unfortunately, to be rather plump. Once he struck a boy—'tasted blood,'

so to speak—he never stopped striking him till he was out of breath. He had a ghastly way of catching a fat little boy under his arm, so that his chubbiness became more apparent and more get-at-able. He was a prototype in his small way of the Kaiser, and would have revelled in the horrors of Belgium. How he used to make us poor little chaps writhe and shriek! An artist, too! He could cut a boy's hand open with a blow of his cane.

Monday was his great day, when all the sins of the week, mostly imagined or pardonable, were atoned for. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that every boy—not counting, of course, the two young men who were at the bottom of all the mischief that called for this excess of fury, but whom the bully feared to meddle with—was whacked on Monday morning; certainly, very few escaped. Many years afterwards, a young fellow came to live near us. It came out that he had been at the Doctor's, and that his father had taken him away because his life was made a burden to him—owing, I suppose, to his plumpness. That must have been thirty years after my time. 'Oh yes,' he said, in answer to my question, 'the old villain is still going on. He must have flogged over a million boys!'

For all this, wonderful to narrate, we were not very unhappy. We got used to our troubles, like the proverbial eel. The more we were flogged,

the less we cared for it. We were rather a savage lot, and usually either engaged in fighting or in arranging a contest for the morrow. The head bully's example had the effect of raising up quite a number of would-be imitators. Sometimes two or three little chaps would combine against a big bully, causing him to give up—temporarily, at any rate—his evil ways. There was a little gravelled court close to the entrance of the school—a two-penny, or perhaps only a penny, edition of the Eton 'sixpenny,' and as bloody if less famous. Here we would pound one another till neither could see. The vanquished one would then be hurried into the baker's shop adjoining the school buildings, when the kindly proprietor would bring first-aid to the wounded. He was wont—with what efficacy I have forgotten—to apply cold steel to our bruises and contusions, and even to resign —at any rate, temporarily—for our behoof the raw beefsteak which had been provided for his dinner.

The baker, when I first knew him, was a middle-aged man of vast strength ; his stature slightly bowed from the weight of the sacks of flour which he was accustomed to carry in from the miller's wagon. He was grey-haired, kind-eyed, with a perpetual peachlike bloom on his rugged face, which was no doubt the combined effect of his oven, and the potations which it incited. I never saw him in a coat, and the sleeves of his blue linen shirt were rolled high on

his muscular and hairy arms. His wife was a sour-faced, elderly woman, who was reported to don metaphorically the lower garments which are indued in reality by man. No doubt he made a good living by catering for the hundred or so of hungry fellows ; for whose needs he provided huge trays of hot buns and other delicacies, brought up smoking from the oven on our release from school. To us, the baker appeared a harmless, good-natured man, though his good-nature was, perhaps, chiefly in evidence when evading the regulations laid down by the authorities. It was a shock, on re-assembling after the holidays, to find him transformed, as if by magic, into ' The wicked baker.' From that time, no boy was allowed, under penalty of severe punishment, to enter his shop. His trade—for he had made little attempt at gaining any patronage but ours—was ruined at a blow, and the baker from that day was a ruined man. I was too young to know accurately what his sin was—apparently, it did not lay him open to the penalties of the law—but it was noticed that he aged rapidly, instead of flourishing, as might have been expected, like a green bay-tree.

While the baker is, let us hope, at rest, and the potentate aforesaid has at last ceased from troubling, there must be survivors to whom both of these ministered after their manner who still shudder at the intruding recollections of those

Monday mornings whose anticipated misery brought but little joy to Sunday ; of the glass door whose veiling with a green baize curtain was but a meaningless tribute to decency, since few indeed were ignorant of the hideous rites celebrated with such fateful regularity within.

> 'Hinc exaudiri gemitus et sœva sonore
> Verbera.'

Most assuredly in those days, I never doubted but that of the two sinners the butcher was worse than the baker.

I almost wish I had left the baker alone. The usher—I never think of him if I can help it—was sure to follow. The baker, if he was really wicked, and I have always had my doubts about it, may have been deserving of some punishment. But the usher ! I should wonder if there are any ushers nowadays, only, if there are, I had rather not know.

While one or two of the boarding-houses were presided over by a real live M.A., wearing an official gown and regulation mortar-board, mine was looked after by a being supposed to be of quite an inferior order. The usher was a shy, kindly helot, tall, thin, and pale, clothed in a shabby black suit, who had to do all the drudgery of the school, and to bear the blame of everything that went wrong. After school work was over it was his duty to superintend the big boarding-house

with its thirty or forty boys, and he never had a minute to himself until his young plagues had disappeared for the night. It used to be said that he intended 'going into the Church,' and there was a rumour that he wrote sermons at his desk when he ought to have been correcting exercises, but I feel sure that he was too conscientious for that. I am afraid he was miserably underpaid, or rather that he was scarcely paid at all. The head-master never stood up for him, and therefore the boys, miserable little wretches that they were, thought it safe to insult and worry him.

Going down the hill towards the great city, you first left behind you the red-brick residences of the older inhabitants, surrounded by high-walled gardens which seemed to frown on the gayer and more ambitious mansions of the *nouveaux riches*. Then came the fashionable repositories, with the plate-glass windows. From fashionable the shops dropped gradually to pure useful, and from useful degenerated into downright shabby. Some of these last may have seen better days, they could not well have seen worse. They retired modestly from the footpath and carriage-way, thrusting forward little bare enclosures, which might once have been lawns, between themselves and the broken palings which fronted the enclosures. In one of these, two quarrelsome, dissipated goats might be seen strutting about. The little shop before which they strutted was

one of the poorest of a very poor class indeed, and the goats had but few opportunities of butting their master's customers, though what they had they made the most of. If you looked in you saw a counter with a dingy pair of scales thereon, an empty barrel which might once have contained herrings, a bundle or two of tallow candles (too few in number to account for the prevailing odour to which that of the goats was as incense), and a dirty little grey old man who shuffled about with slippered feet and hands in pockets, while his little twinkling black eyes were apparently on the look-out for customers who never came. Our boys—nice boys, some of them !—never passed the shop without hailing him in uncomplimentary terms, when he would come to the door and curse them (I have no doubt they richly deserved it) in what was reputed to be Norwegian, and indeed no other language could possibly have broken more bones. That there was some special reason, or that he thought so, for his animosity, and for the attentions paid him by our fellows, was evident enough, and I had not long been an inmate of the boarding-house before I learnt that the old gentleman was the father of the usher.

On Saturdays, when we went off to cricket on the common, the usher used to go quietly down the hill to visit his old parent in the goat-defended shop. I hoped he enjoyed his half-holiday, but it scarcely appeared likely. He never had anything

approaching to fun that we could see ; he never laughed, and hardly even smiled, yet he never looked cross. There was a kind, long-suffering look in his eyes which should have made him friends of the little imps he was so forbearing with. He got to like me—I cannot imagine why —in his quiet way; but I think his preference made me feel rather ashamed than proud, though I got before long to see what a fine fellow he must have been. I wished that I had not known about the old father and the goats, or at all events that he had not known that I knew. I am glad to remember now that I never insulted him as some did. Poor fellow ! He died soon after I left, and that was the best thing he could do. Dying, I fancy, was his only chance of 'joining the Ministry,' which was, if I remember rightly, the exact form his earthly aspirations had taken. Few tears probably were shed for him—he would not have expected or understood such lamentations—but as a type of the old-fashioned usher, long since, I hope, done away with, he has always had a soft nook in my memory.

As subsidiaries to the fighting, we had cricket and hockey—which last the small boys 'enjoyed' as it is the custom for some people to 'enjoy' bad health, since the bullies found it a good opportunity for whacking us on the shins ; and there was 'the Heath' a mile or so away, over which we were allowed to wander once a week.

On the verge of 'the Heath' was an inn, 'The Spaniards,' which some of my readers may have visited in their perambulations, and the interior of which was occasionally penetrated by two or three of the big boys. If only the Doctor could have caught them! There was an old Irish costermonger, 'Warlike' by name, who was allowed to bring his barrow to the boarding-house on Saturdays and exchange his commodities for our 'allowances.' One day some of us, meeting him on 'the Heath,' sent him to 'The Spaniards' for cigars. I don't remember their effect on my companions; on me it was direful. I have often wondered what they could have been made of. To think of it! But for old Warlike, I might never have taken to smoking, and, owing to his good offices, it might have happened that I should never have smoked again. But for that cigar, I might almost have forgotten the Doctor. I have often visited 'the Heath' since, but never without taking a look at the tree whereby I smoked it. For some reason it has been singled out for special notice, and provided with a board fence—to preserve it, I suppose, from damage. I should hardly be surprised to find, on my next visit, that —as is the case with houses where someone lived who afterwards became famous — it had been adorned with an inscription commemorating the moving incident to which it was witness so many years ago.

CHAPTER VI

ETON MYTHS

AFTER Highgate came Eton—a rather overpowering contrast. But it was not until I had got over the nuisance—to which every new boy was subjected, and which the fighting habit at D——'s led me at first to think of resenting—of answering every few seconds the three queries as to my name, my tutor, and my boarding-house, that I began to realise fully the gulf between the two rival seats of learning—as I suppose they should be called. I have not visited Eton for some years; but I should be surprised to learn that it is a better or happier place than when I first entered Dame Vavasour's house, facing Barnes's Pool, one evening in the 'forties.

I have written a great deal about Eton, and am not going to repeat myself; but I am frequently reminded, not very agreeably, that I was an eyewitness to many things which the present generation only reads about, and then generally in an incorrect account. Somebody writes to *The*

Times to say he has heard that this or that used to happen at Eton. I could often prove the writer wrong, from my own recollections ; but it is not worth while, and might put an end to an amusing, if unprofitable, correspondence. Not long ago there was a discussion in the Press on no less a person than Joby Joel. A writer, who may have thought he was very clever, compressed all the reports he could gather of J. J. into an essay, which proved triumphantly—as had been done before with Napoleon—that Joby never existed, but was a myth which had grown up in the course of ages. Joby, in my day, was a thickset man of forty or fifty, with a deep-red complexion, always dressed in a short jacket and corduroy trousers, and seldom—in the season—without a football under his arm. A part of his living was derived from blowing footballs for the boys of the Lower School—thence, no doubt, his red complexion—of whose sports he was a rather patronising supporter. Why it should have been worth while to prove that he never existed is hard to imagine. His personality was not very mythical.

Once the myth idea is fully developed, there will always be something new to say about Eton. I find it hard to avoid trying my hand on Spankey, the fat gentleman who traded 'on the Wall' in the 'forties, with his unctuous and complacent smile, or assumption of *de haut en bas*, who has hitherto not received from writers on Eton the attention

of which he was, and is deserving ; and he may one day be exalted—or degraded—into another myth by someone who, finding himself short of copy, will prove, to his own satisfaction, that such a snob as Spankey could never have been born. With what feelings of surprise and gratitude Thackeray, had he chanced to hear of him, would have added him to a collection of which he would have been, if not the chief ornament, yet certainly one of the most delightful ! Spankey's omission from ' Eton Sketches ' was a deplorable oversight on the part of the talented draughtsman, who might have been trusted to omit nothing in his portrayal, while he could not have improved on the amusing pomposity or vulgarity of the reality. Spankey, one hand resting affably on his tin can, whose contents were of less admirable quality than the wares of his competitors on the Wall who had nothing but their culinary efforts to rely upon—with the other patting a newly-arrived lordling condescendingly on the shoulder, or turning his fat back on a new boy of whose lack of family and fortune he had become, as it seemed, instinctively aware! Spankey was the Eton ' Kelly,' with the improvement that his news, while equally dependable, was kept more closely up to date than the editor of that famous and reliable compilation can arrange for. Spankey's information, whencesoever derived, would enable him to congratulate you on the arrival of a new olive-branch to your

family tree—while silently expressing the opinion that these had been already too numerous—as soon or even sooner than his customer received the intelligence from home. How did he manage it? What were his sources of information? For what reason did he collect it? since it could hardly have been a source of profit save when a knowledge of the family finances may have warned him not to allow an impecunious scion to run up a big 'tick.'

Yet only a few yards away, Spankey, had he been minded, might have found an example, that should have taught him better ways, in old Bryant, the captain of the numerous caterers at the Wall, with his kindly old face, and the enormous barrow from which he dispensed quite superior dainties. Bryant was a 'character,' as far as possible, removed from snobbishness. Besides 'sock,' his trade was carving heads on sticks, like another and more capable Jogglebury Crowdey. Boys who were leaving, frequently ordered a likeness of Doctor Hawtrey or their tutor to take away with them. These mementoes were not caricatures, but admirable likenesses. I had one of my tutor, but lost it somehow before leaving Eton. I wish I had been less careless, for it would have been a valuable memorial.

Another possible original for a myth is 'the Eton poet,' reputed to have been a protégé of Palmerston's, to whose credit he did not greatly redound, and who was himself probably ignorant

of poetry. 'The Eton poet,' I am sorry to say, was an awful fraud, and a very dirty one too. His poems, as he called them, had neither rhyme nor reason to recommend them, and his only attribute of poet was his crop of long and greasy black hair.

But suitable foundations for myths—inasmuch as there are few to remember them—are no longer easy to supply. I have pleasure in suggesting Gaffer Kempster, Tolladay's partner at the boat-building yard which did most of the wet-bobbing business at Eton before the advent in the late 'forties of Searle, who was a 'character,' and once, when in his cups, puzzled Stephen Hawtrey, the mathematical master, by inquiring of him, 'How many yards of skim milk does it take to make a bull a flannel jacket?' Tolladay was a silly young man, but both were excellent boat-builders.

The draughtsman of 'Eton Sketches' hailed from a little 'sock' shop—Vacher's—just within bounds. I happened to be there one day when he was standing in the shop with one of the sketches, unfinished, in his hand, and he handed it over to me—from curiosity, no doubt—to hear what I thought about it. 'The sketch' was that of Tom Bott, one of the two Eton policemen in the 'forties. The artist must have had considerable talent to produce these lifelike drawings. They have since been copied and photographed by all writers of books on Eton, whose name is legion, till now the originals are not worth much.

One of them represents the old cricketer, Pickey Powell, who had been an 'All-England' player, and come down to be lob bowler and 'Professor of Cricket' to the boys of Lower School. About forty years ago his portrait wanted cleaning, and I sent it to a 'restorer,' who put his foot, or perhaps it was only his thumb, through it. The others are Harry Adkins, the caterer for Lower Club, chiefly remembered for his 'Water boils!' replied to by a shout of 'Then make tea!' and Fenmore, Doctor Hawtrey's factotum, whom the few survivors of those days no doubt still keep in remembrance.

It is hard for an old Etonian once started to stop going, but I will end with recalling a hitherto unnoted peculiarity of my tutor, W. A. Carter—to whom I have previously drawn attention both in prose and verse, and to whose house I was removed after about two years at 'my dame's'—which may have been shared by other Eton masters, and which we greatly resented. Carter was quite a fair specimen of the Eton master of those days, not at all a bad fellow in his way, except when he lost his temper; in his calmer moments he could be quite genial, and, like the generality, I have no doubt he did his best in a profession for which he had neither aptitude nor liking. He was a collector of miscellaneous articles, and this hobby frequently leads the rider to disregard the laws of '*meum* and *tuum*.' Three

of us messed together, and, finding breakfast at 'The Christopher' or Webber's too expensive for our finances, decided on purchasing a frying-pan in which to cook the chops and other viands obtained from the butcher up town. W. A. C. had a strong objection to any hot breakfast except his own, and, sniffing the fragrance from afar, would rush hotfoot upstairs to secure whatever might remain of our meal. While generally too late to capture more than a negligible portion of the edibles, we found it almost impossible to arrange for the safety of the indispensable medium, and he must have collected a sufficient number of these to have started him, had he so desired, in a small way as a dealer in hardware. A meeting was held to consider the matter, when our financier stated that we could afford to sacrifice a frying-pan —the cost, if I remember rightly, was about ninepence—every three days. My tutor gave out that these utensils were sent to the poor of Boveney, a small hamlet on the banks of the Thames, near Upper Hope, of which he was the incumbent. Imagine the surprise of these cottagers at receiving about once a week a tantalising gift which they were almost certainly unable to utilise—that is, if they really had them, and 'my tutor' did not keep them as heirlooms.

Whether we gave up hot breakfasts, or my tutor grew tired of stealing frying-pans, I don't remember, but he soon made a new and still

more annoying appearance in the guise of book-collector. There was never the slightest attention given to providing us with books, improving or amusing, to fill the leisure time of which, on winter evenings and Sundays, we sometimes had a good deal. We were left to do nothing, or perhaps something worse. My tutor would prowl round in the evenings, and, snatching up whatever book we were reading, would turn over a few pages, and then calmly put it in his pocket. Whatever excuse he may have found for himself, he never made any to us.

One day, I was reading a book entitled 'One Thousand and One Songs,' my father's property, which I had brought from home. It was, I am sure, quite a good collection of the best songs and ballads in the language—a humble predecessor of 'The Golden Treasury.' This book W. A. C. put in his pocket and carried off, without a word of apology, and I never saw it again. Perhaps if I had remembered to inquire for it, when painfully shedding the five-pound notes which were obligatory on leaving, he would have returned it. As an example of its quality it contained the ballad of 'Hosier's Ghost'—of which some great man said, 'I had rather have written the ballad of "Hosier's Ghost" than the "Annals of Tacitus."' I think that is putting the 'Ghost' far too high, or Tacitus too low; but it was no doubt worthy of being remembered, as were other poems in the book,

which were swept away, as far as I was concerned, into at least partial oblivion.

I am thankful for having early recognised that there is a love of sport implanted in every breast, which, while some are enabled to gratify it in luxurious and, what may be termed legitimate ways, others are compelled to feed on a less liberal diet. The latter may be true sportsmen, who put up with what they can get rather than have no sport at all. ' Bread has been made, indifferent, from potatoes,' but even a slice of potato bread, as many people have recently found, is better than nothing ; and some of the eaters appear to be as well nourished as those who have been dieted on wheaten flour. A good deal depends on the disposition of the sportsman.

The delight which that fine old man, Dr. Hawtrey, found in his wielding of the birch—the only form of sport allowed him by his position—was perhaps not much less than that of the racing magnate after being proclaimed the winner of a big race at Epsom or Ascot. When this is understood, our laughter, or even our pity for these sportsmen, is turned to envy.

I can imagine ' my tutor ' emerging stealthily from his study, and picking up the scent like a hound thrown into a covert certain to hold a fox, sniffing as he tiptoed up the stairs, till on opening the door he could hardly refrain from giving tongue and feeling as pleased with his capture

as an M.F.H. after a kill in the open, following on a fast thing in the shires. Peace to his Manes. I trust that during the sixty or seventy years that have passed since my 'One Thousand and One Songs' came into his possession, his heirs and assigns have enjoyed and profited by them. As I said, but for a quick temper he was quite a 'good sort.'

When I left, he gave me a Chalmers's edition of Shakespeare, in eight volumes, which must have accounted for a good deal of the honorarium with which I had to endow him on leaving, and I have long since forgiven him—even the frying-pans.

CHAPTER VII

THE PASSING OF THE 'DON'

A CHANGE came over Oxford in the later part of the last century, which would have rendered it almost unrecognisable to anyone who had not witnessed its gradual development. True, the old buildings remain, as in the days when I was 'at the "House" in the 'fifties,' but the Don of that period is as extinct as the dodo. New suburbs have arisen, with handsome streets, in which reside the new, or not very new, professors, with their wives and families—formerly interdicted luxuries. Humanising as the change must be, I am so far a *laudator temporis acti* as to wish that one or two of the type of Dean Gaisford could somehow have been preserved, if only as a memento of the qualities once deemed not unfitting for the Head of a great college. But for this it is now too late. There must have been something in the Dean worth preserving, since our feeling for him amounted almost to reverence which he appeared an unlikely man to inspire, and we the least likely to entertain. This feeling, oddly enough, has

increased rather than lessened in the course of years. Boys—we were little more—seem sometimes readier at diagnosing than their elders. We came to the conclusion that under a rugged exterior he concealed a kind heart, as of a bear that should hug you in sport. I remember him a heavy, round-shouldered old man, little addicted to smiling. The Deanery dinners, to which we were invited in batches, were not very jovial affairs, though occasionally brightened by the intrusion of a little comedy. The shy undergraduates used to collect together at the door, and the Dean would make little rushes at them from time to time, like a butting-ram. His attempts at conversation, from not being adapted to the tastes of his guests, were frequently nipped in the bud. Occasionally he hit the mark. V., who was wholly given up to shooting, was once present at one of these parties, and the Dean, probably from knowing his people, had heard of his skill with the gun.

'A good country for snipe, Mr. V.,' he began gruffly.

'It is that,' responded V., and the conversation ended.

The following is a fair instance of the Dean's liking for a sort of clumsy fun. Lord A.'s son, who was at 'the House,' was invited to a wedding in the middle of term, and his tutor called at the Deanery to request leave of absence for him.

'You think, Mr. B.,' the Dean inquired

blandly, 'that it would do no harm to disturb his studies in the middle of term?'

'I think not, Mr. Dean,' replied the tutor confidently.

'Ah, well, it might freshen him up! And his father wishes him to go?'

'Yes, Mr. Dean.'

'And you wish him to go?'

'Certainly, Mr. Dean.'

'Very well, Mr. B., then he can't go.'

The Dean's determination to uphold the dignity of 'the House' was fully appreciated, and no wonder, since it occasionally acted as a most useful shield. Some few may remember the advent into Hall during collections of the Junior University Proctor, Mr. X., of —— College, eager to detect some delinquent who had escaped him on the previous night. The Dean, who was standing with his back to the big fire-place, and his gown tucked under his arms, moved slowly across to the intruder, who had not uncovered. His gruff 'Take off your cap, young man!' was very effective. The youthful proctor turned and fled, his ears waxing redder and redder until we lost sight of them.

An excellent portrait of the Dean in his favourite attitude was in my time exhibited in the window of R., the clever silhouettist's shop in 'the High.' It was reported that some nobleman had been sent down to induce the Dean to accept

a bishopric which the latter had already refused. The well-known figure of Venables—then the host of the Mitre Hotel—was introduced to represent the noble ambassador, kneeling before the Dean, to whom he was holding out a mitre. The Dean, hands behind him, back to the fire, was depicted as saying :—

'Stand off my rug, my lord!'

In his epistolatory efforts the Dean was sometimes more curt even than F.M. the Duke of Wellington. Lord ——, who wrote to inquire how his son's studies were progressing, must have been rather astonished to receive for answer :—

'My Lord,—
Such letters give much trouble to
Your humble servant,
The Dean of Christ Church.'

On another occasion he was even briefer, the sole reference to Christ Church in the voluminous report of the Oxford and Cambridge Commission being :—

'From the Dean of Christ Church we have received *no* communication.'

In Peckwater resided a genial old canon, Barnes, who was always asking, with the view perhaps of one day refuting some Malthusian or other heresy—how many children one's father had; to repeat the inquiry at the next opportunity. I think he must sometimes have been astonished

at the rapid increase in the tale of fabulous olive-branches. 'Twenty children!' he would ejaculate, *tendens ad sidera palmas*, 'Dear me, dear me!'

An example of a different sort of Don to Dean Gaisford, and less worthy of surviving, was Osborne Gordon, senior censor of 'the House' in the 'fifties. He, too, was a 'character' in his way, but as unpopular with the undergraduates, whose nerves it seemed his delight to set on edge, as the Dean was the reverse. Men have before become famous from one speech or one poem, but 'O. G.' was probably the only man who ever gained a reputation for humour from one joke, and that a very poor one. At any rate, it was the only one that the memories of his most ardent admirers have been able to retain. 'There is the cow story,' they used to tell you triumphantly. It seems that on the senior censor's milkman asking for assistance to replace a cow that died from feeding on a mackintosh cape, the former pointed out that her diet had not the effect of making her milk waterproof. If he was really the humorist some people put him down for, the evanescent effect of his good things may be explained by the fact that the listener's attention was diverted by his comical aspect. His long, thin person, decked in shabby black, his long, slightly reddish nose, bright eyes, and humorous mouth made him practically independent of

humour, which however he evoked in the dullest minds, and some of ours were exceedingly dull. It may have been humility that led him carefully to discount a reputation for an egregious amount of learning by ignoring the eighth letter of the alphabet except on those occasions when it is customary to do so.

'Mr. 'Ow, Mr. 'Ow, bring me a 'undred lines of 'Omer in your own 'and, Mr. 'Ow!'

I have often thought that this failing—such a droll one when his position is considered—may have acted inversely to charity, and covered a multitude of good qualities. As it was, we put him down as a square peg in a round hole—a formula descriptive of far too many of his contemporaries. As a rule he was ready for any emergency, and I only remember one instance when he was unequal to the occasion. This was when, on entering the lecture-room one morning, he found the seats and desks had all been removed —they had been burnt in Peckwater on the previous night! For some reason, though I had seen several bonfires in Peckwater, I saw nothing of this one, which public opinion considered went a little too far. Marius amongst the ruins of Carthage must have looked quite jovial compared with 'O. G.' in his denuded room.

The junior censor was a mild, harmless, spectacled little man, with a perpetual blush on his rather chubby cheeks, and absolutely useless

as far as keeping order among the undergraduates, or imparting any useful information to them, was concerned. He had the amount of popularity that can be achieved by one who is known to be good-natured because he is too shy or too timid to be anything else. He appeared to be without opinions of his own, while diffident in accepting other people's. A nice and intelligent woman who cared for him might have done wonders for him, for he was, no doubt, at bottom a worthy and well-meaning man ; but he wanted someone to tell him so. I suppose he went down to his grave without guessing, or even wishing to guess, what the forbidden influence would have done for him. Even had such a scandal been permitted, the idea of ' proposing ' to a member of the opposite sex could never have occurred to him. In these days some woman—cruel to be kind—would snap him up, and make a man of him.

A contrast to these, and of a type even less likely to survive than our honoured Dean, was one of the tutors at ' the House,' who was later to eventuate into a humorist of the first water. He was an intimate friend of a connection of mine, then at ' the House,' who however never hinted to me that the author-to-be of ' Alice in Wonderland ' was anything out of the common. It was not until ' Alice ' had been for some time famous, that it dawned on me that I used to see the author frequently strolling about in Tom Quad

like the other tutors, without anyone, as far as I was aware, having a premonition of his quality. Possibly the wonderful gift had not then been granted him, or he may have taken considerable trouble to hide it from his contemporaries. Indeed 'O. G.,' with his one joke and comical aspect, would have struck a passer-by as likely to be the more humorous personality.

CHAPTER VIII

A MID-VICTORIAN BISHOP

THE following sketch of a mid-Victorian bishop was written many years ago. It was probably a digest of three or four men who varied so little one from the other, that, if they had changed places, the effect would have been neither disturbing or even noticeable. A few bishops there were who differed so entirely from the components of this sketch, that their inclusion would have made the resulting average misleading. These men stood a head and shoulders above their compeers, and their names will present themselves at once to my readers. They were, however, scarcely more popular than would be an average Victorian bishop, if brought to life again, with the clergy of a modern go-ahead diocese. I must suppose that the commonplace Victorian bishop was fairly suited to the age in which he officiated. It is uncertain whether the bishops are responsible for changes in the rank and file of the clergy, or the latter impose their virtues or the reverse on their bishops. Perhaps it is a little of both.

A Mid-Victorian Bishop

Certainly a set of quite ordinary old-fashioned clergy could hardly co-exist with a bishop of very advanced views. The former would not know what to make of the latter, any more than a diocese served by 'Priests' and 'Holy Fathers' would be able to work with a bishop possessing only the ordinary good qualities which, however, would once have been amply sufficient to recommend him. During the last fifty or sixty years there has probably been as great a change in bishops as in everything else. It is some time since I have foregathered with any of them.

Our bishop is a little, dry, old man, very worn and thin, and the episcopal gaiters encase the merest apology for legs. Care and anxiety (there is no greater trouble in the life of some people than the ever-present fear of over-acting or over-doing anything) have scratched his face and brow with numberless tiny wrinkles. The face would have been a kind one if he had not lived in an age which imposes even on bishops the duty of looking, or at least trying to look, shrewd. He has a pair of bright, intelligent, brown eyes, which suggest a capacity for insight, but if he possesses this gift he must sometimes forgo the use of it.

We country folk do not find it easy to see into the bishop, and I have sometimes amused myself by wondering whether the successful gazer would be repaid for his pains. When he recognises an opponent, which he seems to do intuitively

(though, like other doctors who pride themselves on their 'diagnosis,' he sometimes jumps too quickly to a conclusion), he draws back into his shell like a snail. He seems to be always expecting a trap, but I have never heard a rumour of one being laid for him, and it is certain that he is seldom caught. Though he avoids, somewhat too elaborately, any display of feeling, it is quite possible that there may be a spring deep down. Humour he never attempts, though I am mistaken if he could not sometimes say a good thing if he chose. But he is of the race which thinks fun out of place in a bishop as in a churchyard. He has no doubt heard, in the course of his travels, many excellent jokes, but he has never been known to laugh at any one of them, though possibly he may enjoy them in his own way. Once, indeed, I myself saw his sober face light up with a momentary twinkle, and alone by his palatial fireside he may occasionally thaw into a chuckle, like the frozen notes in the horn of the celebrated Baron. Supposing him to have been possessed, when newly appointed, of a sense of humour, he, no doubt, thought it proper to suppress what he may have considered an unworthy and inappropriate adjunct. The awful thought might have arisen that indulgence in it might one day lead him to make fun of himself, and though a bishop's sleeves are of a sufficient size to hide any but the most uncontrollable burst of merriment, yet they were not

intended for that purpose, and it is only the clown who does not irritate us when he laughs at his own calling. Yet if a bishop can learn the lesson not to smile at himself, it must be hard sometimes for him to refrain from laughing at his admirers. A bishop (who of all men should be most capable of insight and self-knowledge) must surely be aware that his high and sacred office does not necessarily place him above all human frailty. It may certainly be more confidently expected from a bishop than from a judge, that he should be above pride and anger, and it is to the credit of the former that the expectation is not too frequently disappointed. People have long got to know that judges, however honest, are often very human indeed. Those who are disappointed in their bishops have generally themselves to thank in that they expected too much from even the best of men. Laymen are occasionally sarcastic, and the sarcasm of the evil-minded can only be met by a confident assumption of superiority. If such can be really felt, so much the better; if not, it must be counterfeited. A bishop is one of the very few people who is improved when he values himself at the price with which he is ticketed by his blindest and most subservient constituent.

I used to fancy, from knowing that when plain Rev. John Smith, our bishop, had been one of the simplest of men, that the episcopal state must bore him immensely. I am now not at all

sure that such is the case. I think I have once or twice caught him regarding himself with some complacency in a mirror, making a somewhat elaborate arrangement of his sleeves before preaching, or glancing, if not at his lean legs, yet at their official coverings in a manner suggesting that his get-up was not obnoxious to him. Yet starch is only a modern necessity of Christianity. A bishop (the founder of whose religion knew how to move men without lawn) seems to common folk sadly out of place amongst pomps and vanities.

Our bishop lives in a palace in a deer park, near a country village, which is some distance from a railway station, at which only slow trains, and but few of these, ever stop. He is almost always going somewhere, and, as he is the most punctual of men, while the trains are unfortunately quite the reverse, he appears to spend a great deal of his time at the little station. Passing slowly up or down the line, to or from the village at which his ministrations are required, must be trying to the spirit and to the flesh. He seldom on these excursions enters into conversation with anyone, but appears to amuse himself sadly, and chiefly, by looking down at his knees.

He seemed aware that he was rather a wet blanket at the luncheon given by our jovial vicar the other day, on the mirth-inspiring occasion of the opening of the new cemetery, and hurried

away as quickly as decency permitted, though, as usual, he had to wait some time at the station. There is no doubt that many of his functions could be quite as ably and more cheerfully performed by the Registrar, who is a jolly fellow enough, and would not object to going about. The bishop does not throw himself with any warmth into the affairs of his clergy. If what you imagine a wrong in your parish wants redressing he wishes you well—he could not possibly wish ill to anyone—but he is too careful of offending to take sides in the matter. This vexes those who think that a bishop should stand up for his diocese and for his clergy, as a former Dean of Christ Church used to stand up for 'the House.' The fact is that even in a bishop caution may be overdone. It would be far better to make an occasional mistake than never to show any brilliancy, to fall than never attempt to soar, to make an enemy here and there—what straightforward man can avoid doing so?—than never to make any warm friends.

Our bishop has a fear of, or an objection to, churchwardens. It is impossible to do more than guess at his reasons. He may find some of the poor fellows rustic or ill-bred, so when he has said 'How-d'ye-do?' (with his hands under his silk apron) he walks off to exchange nothings with somebody else. The zeal of churchwardens would be augmented by a little courtesy shown to them

by a real live bishop. This courtesy would also be a graceful and cheap way of remunerating them for labours often disagreeable and seldom acknowledged. You notice a cloud on the weather-beaten face of old Farmer Jones, who has just been introduced to his lordship. 'I told him,' says the hearty old fellow afterwards, 'as I was downright glad to see him, and as how we were getting on very well down here, and he never said nothing at all! I believe he's an old stick.' It would have been better for the interests of the Church in Farmer Jones's parish if the bishop had shut himself up in his palace that day, since even the humblest of men object to the snub direct. Masters of hounds are not nowadays above recognising that without the goodwill of the tenant-farmer there would be no more fox-hunting.

After all, I should not like to be too hard on the bishop, who has no doubt the good of the Church at heart, though his heart is not worn on his sleeve. His life, for a not inconsiderable remuneration, is given up to her service. He never complains of the long hours spent by himself or in uncongenial company in the slow train. However disgusted he may sometimes feel at finding himself part of a pageant, an actor in a sort of ecclesiastical Lord Mayor's Show, he plays his rôle without wincing. He has an immense amount of trouble of which he might be relieved without any damage being done to the interests

of the Church. He is always writing long letters, from which, as from the speeches of a late eminent statesman, there is frequently very little meaning to be extracted. But from the careful way in which he lays down ecclesiastical law (when he can be induced to give his opinion) I have often thought that a good lawyer was spoilt on the day he took orders.

I would not dream of being so rude as to inquire into the creed held by our bishop, nor, as long as he is so reticent, does it much matter. He may have—or he may lack—the firmest possible belief in matters on which the advanced school has long decided to doubt. It is scarcely fair to accuse him of evasion because he has decided that these questions had better not be raised by him. There are articles in the Church's creed which he has accepted the duty of believing. He is too honest and too true a gentleman to set fire to the rickyard while he is receiving the goodman's pay.

My chief objection to him is that he raises no enthusiasm. These are ticklish times, and it seems to me that a bishop who cannot raise a little enthusiasm has no *raison d'être*.

CHAPTER IX

COUNTRY EDITORS IN THE PAST

WHATEVER widely diversified opinions people may hold on the matter of National Education, the fact remains that it has made considerable progress during the last fifty years. For this the improvement in the Provincial Press is largely responsible, and some of these papers, conducted by editors of the highest ability and intelligence, run their London rivals very close. Perhaps, as there were once too few newspapers, there are now too many, and I should be in favour of a law forbidding anyone to own more than 150 newspapers. It is only from survivals in a few bucolic districts where the inhabitants take no interest in anything but farming-sales and other local matters, that it is possible for the present generation to realise the sort of literary food served out by country editors to their fathers.

The editor, sixty years ago, of a county paper which shall be nameless, was a quiet, apologetic little man, a sort of editorial Snagsby, who resided

as a matter of course in the Cathedral city, and who, by perpetual bowing and scraping to the Dean and Chapter and the Mayor and Corporation, had lost any portion of starch he may have been born with. For each and all of these functionaries he had a distinct and special bow. He kept a little stationer's shop, at which could be purchased notepaper, albums, 'gift-books'—which no one even in those days would have bought except to give away—and daguerreotypes of the Cathedral and the Dean. From the sale of these last he probably derived the greater part of a somewhat precarious income. When the Dean chanced to be unpopular, the portraits, growing dingier day by day, suggested anything but a roaring trade.

The county paper appeared weekly, on Tuesday, and therein, elbowed into a corner by the more interesting district intelligence, would appear a short summary of what had occurred in distant and therefore less important localities. The editor was reported to write his own 'leaders,' and if his personality did not suggest that these would be of a specially lively character, they seldom disappointed expectation. They were made up of a few vapid remarks on something that had occurred in the last week, or perhaps the week before—the county was not particular to a day or two. Political news would be generally confined to the speech of the County Member in

Parliament. The County Member was not elected on political grounds, but out of respect for his ancient lineage, and it was thought a duty to stick to him as long as no scion of a still older family came forward. The county did not want new men, or talking men, or even party men, but fine old crusted family men. For the reason, perhaps, that the County Member never opened his lips, politically speaking, in the county, it got to be reported—and this view would have been confirmed by a glance at the reports of the debates in the London papers—that he followed the custom, which some may wish was still general, of sending his speeches to the editor of the county paper instead of delivering them in the House of Commons, where—as appears to have been the case recently with a Nationalist Member—he may have been unable to catch the Speaker's eye.

In the silly season—it is not now always the non-parliamentary season that appears the silliest—failing a flower show or a yeomanry inspection (and these joys were of infrequent occurrence), the place of honour in the county paper would be occupied by descriptions of toads found embedded in solid rocks—of which naturalists made such opportune discoveries that the poor creatures must have known to a day when Parliament ceased to sit—miraculous showers of ladybirds, and a statement relating to the dimensions of a mammoth gooseberry, which was reported to be always in

type and to go with the 'goodwill' when the paper, as, alas! occasionally happened, changed hands. There was as yet no Yankee or other humour for the editor to draw upon, but there was a 'Poet's Corner,' which was both small and badly filled. The days when everyone was to write verse was in the dim and distant future. It is also probable that the 'penny-a-liner,' afterwards to become famous, was then unborn. Certainly no one ever saw anything in the paper for which a sane person would have paid one penny per line. There was very little thunder about the editor, but then the sky was clear, and to thunder out of a clear sky takes a Jove. Possibly, under other circumstances, he might have developed a turn for spite, sarcasm, and other virtues which editors subjected to competition are accustomed to utilise. He developed nothing of the sort, and yet, if he had known it, he had his rivals.

It requires a fortunate combination of circumstances to produce a truly original character. Such was Mr. Measdy, one of the county editor's rivals and the opportune product of a seaside village, fifteen miles or so from the Cathedral town, whose inhabitants, with the keenest desire for news, had the smallest possible opportunities for obtaining any. Elsewhere Mr. Measdy might have sunk into a mere gossip or tale-bearer, instead of being, as was generally allowed, a beneficial

institution. He resided in a board shanty near the beach, and was a sort of sea-farmer or land-fisherman. In fine weather the roof of his tar-soaked domicile could be seen from afar sparkling gaily in the sun. Adjoining it was a little field—by courtesy—roughly penned in with pieces of broken-up boats and the poles of old windlasses. The enclosure was neither pasture nor shingle, but appeared able to support a piebald calf or two of not very epicurean tastes, which might have been indebted to the tar brush for their black patches. Mr. Measdy also rented a little field some distance inland, which he had probably taken in anticipation of advantages likely to accrue to the news business from walking to and fro. About half a mile from the shanty was a spot where three roads met. Mr. Measdy would have welcomed a fourth, but the fourth would have run into the sea. Here, with a truss of hay on his shoulder if homeward bound, or a barrow of seaweed before him when making his way inland, he would stand and talk by the hour to any passer-by who could be induced to listen. It was seldom that he arrived at the 'three ways' without finding that there was someone in sight. The white roads stretched before him for about three miles, and it would not be long before the miller's man from the windmill on the hill, or the butcher—who was always in a hurry but would put it off—or, failing these, the parson would heave in sight. The

parson was not above a gossip, though Mr. Measdy was not sufficiently imbued with a belief in reciprocity to respond by attending church. A spectator strange to the village would marvel to see two black signposts, as he had thought them, after remaining motionless for an hour or two, separate and move off briskly in opposite directions. Very little time was lost by either party in disseminating the new tidings. 'They tell me as . . .' was the simple formula with which Mr. Measdy would commence his recital. The parson would begin with 'I am truly grieved to have to record . . .'

Mr. Measdy was rather a strange figure. He had a large bald head, fringed with brown locks unacquainted with the art of the barber ; a large round face, ruddy with sun and wind and intended by nature to express good-humour ; an enormous smiling mouth, and big gleaming teeth. He was at least half way between sixty and seventy, but he had probably never looked young, and had his recompense now in not looking old. He was about five feet ten inches in height, broad shouldered, and deep chested. His dress was a suit of corduroy, which had presumably seen better days, though the oldest inhabitant might have been unable to recall them. Portions of his clothes which had been subjected to extra friction had risen to the occasion, taken the colour and, apparently, the consistency of mahogany, and become as imper-

vious as tar and grease could make them to all assaults of rain or salt water. There was the same indefinable suggestion of the sailor about his get-up that was observable in all the inhabitants of the seaside village. Not that, taken piecemeal, there was anything specially sailor-like in the gait or roll of the man to suggest that he had ever handled any rope except a cart-rope ; yet if he had been encountered, which was highly improbable, in an inland village, or in the Midlands, many people would have put him down for a sailor. There were patches of tar on his roomy garments as there were patches of everything else, but he was distinguished by the *cognoscenti* from the majority of the inhabitants in that he was not accustomed to signal his approach so much by the odour of tar as by that of the cowhouse or pigsty. There may have been days, however, when the tar predominated over its rivals.

Even newsagents must live—though some might deny the necessity—and since the profession, however creditable and enjoyable, brought no grist, directly, to the mill, Mr. Measdy combined it with another which, while fairly remunerative, was also of great assistance to the calling in which he chiefly delighted. Mr. Measdy was a pig-dealer or middleman. Putting pecuniary results on one side, it is hard to say which business was of most assistance to the other, but it is certain that they worked well together. The pig business was

an excuse for going anywhere at any time. Even if Mr. Measdy, as was frequently the case, had no pigs to sell, he could hardly be supposed to know—though he probably knew very well—that the farmer whom it was his pleasure to interview had none to part with. He used to 'hear of' pigs for those who wanted them, and he would find customers for those who possessed a super-abundance. He made no fixed charge for his mediation, with the result that he was sometimes recompensed by both parties. The prolongation of a 'deal' gave opportunity for the investigation or even the manufacture—for he was not without a touch of imagination—of a scandal, and he seldom showed any anxiety to bring matters to a conclusion. 'Well,' he would remark as he went off—this going off was sometimes an illusory proceeding, as he would stop round the corner to confer, by arrangement, with the cow-man or the groom—'you'll, maybe, think it over before I'm round again.'

Mr. Measdy, though by no means ignorant or uneducated—indeed, some people thought he knew a great deal too much—had been born before the days of compulsory 'three R's,' and could neither read nor write. But he had developed an old-fashioned memory, which supplied the place of these modern luxuries remarkably well. In addition to his memory, and, as it were, a concession to popular prejudice, he carried about

with him wherever he went a short hazel stick. This would start without a scratch on it on Monday, but would gradually get covered with notches as the week drew to a close. There would be a big notch for Farmer Denne's old sow, and ten little notches for the farrow. Middling-sized pigs had middling-sized notches. One end of the stick was reserved for items of news relating to bipeds. Mr. Measdy would very likely have tied knots in his handkerchief but for the all-sufficient reason that he never carried one. On Saturday evening, instead of going, as everyone else did, to the public-house, he would remain at home in company with the wife of his bosom. After supper the hazel wand would be taken from the corner and the notches gone through one by one. Negotiations that had not been concluded, and scandals imperfectly developed, would be carried over—like the minutes of a meeting—to next week's stick. In winter Mr. Measdy would then put the old stick in the fire ; in summer he would whittle it thoughtfully into shreds—which Mrs. Measdy had afterwards the pleasure of sweeping up—and it may be presumed that either process was equivalent to putting away another number of his weekly diaries on the crowded shelf of his memory.

The pig-dealer was but one of two rivals with whom the editor of the county paper had to reckon, who dispensed news, and even distributed advertisements free of charge. Mr. Measdy's colleague

was a fat, blind man, by name Purvis, brother to a small farmer in the neighbourhood, who had lost his sight years ago after an attack of scarlet fever. He made a living by buying eggs from the farmers and cottagers, and retailing them to the gentry who did not keep hens, or whose hens were not prolific. He used to walk down the village street with his basket on his arm, tapping in front or on either side with the stick held in the other hand. He would feel along the hedge till he touched the post of the gate he wanted, and through this he would pass without hesitation to the house door. He knew you before you spoke to him, by your step, or your horse's, or by something in the air, or by the absence of it. This was strange in a district where so many of the inhabitants were redolent of tar or fish. He looked you straight in the face, with the clear eyes that saw nothing. Many folk who are by no means blind use their eyes to as little purpose. He had an air of knowing everything, which may have been a mistake, as it may sometimes have prevented people from telling him news. It was thought that he knew whether you were in good or bad spirits, that he puzzled out the reason when he had passed you, and retailed it with his next batch of eggs. What connection he supposed to exist between the two pursuits of egg and news peddling it is hard to say, but he certainly knew everything *ab ovo*. He was assisted in his wanderings by his recollection

of the state of affairs that had existed before he lost his sight ; but his head-map of the parish had to be occasionally corrected. It was amusing to see him feeling about for the corner of a cottage which he had heard was to be erected, but which was not there. Dunghills he considered were invented to plague him ; nor was he greatly mollified by their removal just as he had got used to them, though an impartial mind would have allowed that their disappearance in the course of time might have been foreseen. The year in which he lost his sight was to him a sort of A.D. 'Squire Smith, he got married the third year as I went blind.' He used to wonder when an old villager died. 'He was quite young and lusty,' he would say. Many a rich grumbler—with the use of all his senses, only he did not use them—might have profited by the example of his cheerful temper, which not the direst scarcity of eggs could disturb provided that a bit or two of news was forthcoming.

It is a pity to be obliged to confess that neither Measdy nor Purvis were quite as good-natured as they looked. Tale-bearing so often makes mischief—though there are, of course, tales the proclaiming of which from the housetops could do no one any harm—that the science has got a bad name, and the tale-bearers, on the principle that it is as well to be hung for a sheep as a lamb, get to prefer tales which are likely to annoy or do

harm to more innocent recitals. There soon gets to be a spice of devilment in a tale-bearer, and the fee—the price, so to speak, of his news-sheet—is the look of annoyance, possibly of anger, which he soon learns to detect, though his hearer may do his best to hide it.

The two editors were made use of in ways of which they may have been only imperfectly aware. Had anyone a report that he wished spread he had but to resort to the cross roads at the proper time, or to encounter the egg-dealer in the village, and tell his story under a vow of secrecy, when he would get an advertisement free of charge. With all this the newsmongers were fine, honest-looking fellows who appeared worthy of a better trade. Mr. Measdy especially had a face that it was almost impossible to connect with evil-speaking, to say nothing of lying. Neither of them was above doing a neighbour a good turn if it came in the way of news, or did not interfere with it. Once they conjointly got up a subscription for the widow Mullins, who had lost her cow. It is to be feared that to them also might be traced the scandalous tale, to the disadvantage of the poor widow's daughter, which drove her and her mother out of the parish before the subscription had come to much. But it is well known that business requirements may cause charity not only to begin at home, but also not infrequently to also end there.

CHAPTER X

DOCTORS AND PARSONS

ANYONE who in those days took up his residence in a country village of which he had no special knowledge would feel some confidence that the doctor and the parson would not fail him, and that both of them would prove to have a certain amount of breeding and education apart from their professions. Only occasionally was this confidence misplaced—and then because the new-comer had placed his hopes too high—when it became necessary to poach on the next parish. There was a little sameness in the doctors, owing, no doubt, to the fact that the country practitioner frequently brought up his son, sometimes his two sons, to succeed him, so that a youth who had left the village might, on his return after forty or fifty years' absence, find to his surprise—until he recalled the local custom—an exactly similar doctor, with the same smile, or the same objection to smiling, facing him in the old surgery.

There was seldom anything very striking about

the country doctor's professional methods, as on the infrequent occasions when an operation was necessary he would call in the rather more up-to-date services of a friend from the county town. He may be supposed to have filled the usual number of bottles with what were then the usual medicines, to be consumed with the usual effect which, while occasionally quite negligible, was never very violent.

The great Insurance Bill which started our Premier on his road to fame, was not even dreamt of, nor has it done much more even now than to increase enormously the income of the country practitioner, who, by the time that three or four sons have followed their fathers in the practice, will—since it is a maxim of country doctors to be entertained rather than to entertain others—surely eventuate as millionaires.

Politically, the country doctor was generally a Tory, but without any knowledge of politics or of the reasons which made that political creed the only possible or respectable one for dwellers in the country. He was also—contrary to the ideas of some people that doctors are invariably unbelievers —a fairly regular attendant at church, except when an epidemic was ravaging the village, when he had to spend a little more than the usual half hour in mixing his medicines, of which the component parts were confined almost entirely to magnesia, rhubarb, and senna. I well remember, when

scarcely past babyhood, being held tightly by one of our two nurses, while the other fixed a tin funnel into my mouth through which she administered an ample dose of the latter beverage, notwithstanding my screams and objurgations.

For some reason, even in the days when 'characters' were beginning to get scarce, it was seldom that the author in search of copy, on meeting our doctor, turned his back for a moment to scribble a surreptitious line or two in his notebook. For the rest—country doctors were generally good-natured, with the knowledge where too much good nature would lead them, and without any sense of humour, which last, if it left him a not necessarily disagreeable neighbour, made him, as my father would sometimes complain, a very boring companion.

If he was a man of ordinary intelligence the doctor had not, except in the case of a perfect stranger, much use for any gift of diagnosis with which he may have been endowed. It may have been an advantage or the reverse that, having been brought up in the place where his father practised before him, he knew the weak spot in all his old and probable patients. When the parson's fat pony was seen bustling up in a lather there was no need to tell him what was the matter. The colchicum was ready almost before the boy had dismounted from the fat pony. Young Ashford's spavined mare coming up the street at

a hand gallop meant that his father, the old farmer, had been going too fast again, like his mare. While getting ready to accompany or follow the messenger, the doctor would make a somewhat elaborate show of inattention to any explanatory remarks, and indeed would have been hurt, if not mortally offended, to find that the old friend he was preparing to treat for asthma had broken his leg.

The new parson generally came from outside, but instead of proving a round peg in a square hole he would generally fit into his place as if it had been made for him. He would not have thought of taking a country living had he been in perfect ignorance of the many subtle differences existing between the country and the town. He was generally an honest, simple man, more zealous for goodness than for doctrine, or at least he talked very little about the latter. He was content to be a friend of, but a little below the squire—who in his turn was not greatly above the farmers—to relieve to the best of his ability the troubles, spiritual or worldly, of the local gentry, without affecting to be above sharing in their simpler pleasures, and—a far more difficult task—to be a real friend in adversity, or comparatively good fortune, to the poor, without even the slightest touch of superiority or patronage.

It should always be remembered to his credit that the parson was in those days responsible for everything—it was not very much—that was

done towards educating what would soon be the manhood of the country. The school buildings and the expenses appertaining to them were in the hands of the parson, who subsidised the subscriptions of the few parishioners who had anything to spare from an income even less able to meet the call. If these subscribers were few in number those who took a real interest in the school were fewer still. Some villages were not possessed of a school ; there would be a cottage or two, very likely, to which children would be sent at irregular intervals—the attendance officer was in the dim and distant future—to learn their A B C, which was as far as the old woman who kept what she called her ' school ' could lead them on the road to knowledge. Some of the village schools were fairly good, and then it would be found that the parson was above the average. No Government had as yet seen the necessity for educating the people, a great number of whom did not even aspire to the A B C.

But a change was coming over the parsons, the first sign of which was the renunciation of the time-honoured name. The parting of the ways came when country parsons developed into priests. Oddly enough, preaching in a white surplice, instead of a black gown, was the accepted sign of an intention to exchange the perhaps too unimpressive rustic service for a more striking ceremonial. I remember, when I was a small

boy, a new-comer taking this step, when the sailors who crowded the gallery stood up in a body and hissed him. It was droll that they should have considered themselves capable judges of Church discipline. Not that all or even many of these white-surpliced gentry went over to Rome ; the majority preferred to sit on the fence. But from that date the old-fashioned, but honest and faithful, country parson petered out. It was now the priest with the newest thing in stoles and attitudes. All these things, especially the candles (which played a prominent part in the new religion, as if salvation might be by tallow as well as by oil), attracted the female portion of the congregation, to whom the priest paid such deference that he had very little time for the males. It might almost be imagined that there was no male congregation, and this may one day be the case.

Nowadays the incumbent of a country village frequently knows nothing of country life, of which indeed he apparently prefers to remain in absolute ignorance. It sounds incredible, but, no doubt, some might be found who had officiated for years in country villages without noticing the manifestation of nature entitled 'the fall of the leaf,' and who wonders, when their attention is called to the bare branches, whether they can have been hand-picked.

Without being of very inquiring minds, people began to ask how a man could dare to talk about

heaven, which he has not seen, when he had noticed nothing on earth whereon he had lived, with his eyes shut, for forty or perhaps fifty years.

Parsons are now demanding increased stipends, which should surely only be granted to those who have shown a certain amount of fitness for the duties which they have undertaken, and to which many of them—perhaps with the best intentions—appear incapable of doing justice. They are also claiming the right of presenting themselves as candidates for the House of Commons! This would mean for them more talking, for which the majority of laymen consider that they, the parsons, have already sufficient opportunities. Indeed, about two sermons a year are as much as could be extracted from the brains of the majority with any prospect of benefit to their hearers. Yet these unfortunate men are called on, or imagine they are called on, for at least a hundred sermons annually. No doubt their admission to the House of Commons would have the effect of diminishing the flow of pulpit eloquence; but as politicians I have always found parsons lamentable failures, from their inability to understand the A B C of a science which even its lifelong students are sometimes unable to master. There are certainly but few parsons who would be anything but a nuisance if promoted to the House of Commons, though some might not improbably attain success on the stage.

CHAPTER XI

THE BRITISH FLEET IN 1851

IT would be hard for anyone, who had not witnessed the gradual development, to realise the complete change that has taken place in naval matters since the 'sixties. In a period of about sixty years we have passed from wooden ships entirely dependent on sails: first to ships with auxiliary steam power, then to armoured vessels at first only partially protected (as in the American North and South War), then to iron ships gradually becoming larger, and with armaments daily increasing in size and range. It seems certain that the size of battleships, after the War, will diminish; while the range of the guns may go on increasing—and quite possibly the Kaiser, in his enforced retirement, is already contemplating the ordering of emplacements for his guns, for the next war, to carry across the Atlantic.

On the wall of the room where I am now sitting hangs a water-colour drawing of some of the warships which were present at the Great Review at Spithead in 1851. At this review the Queen was present on board the *Duke of Wellington*,

a wooden ship carrying 131 guns—pop-guns they would now be considered—and with auxiliary steam. She appears in the drawing with one very small funnel. In a naval engagement to-day she would not survive five minutes, while she would certainly do no harm to her opponents.

The drawing includes the *Algiers*, ninety guns; *Imperieuse*, fifty guns ; *Flying Fish*, six guns—this last the only vessel with two funnels. All these ships had a certain amount of steam power in addition to their sails. There are other naval drawings on the wall, including one of the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert*, and another of the 'Bombardment of Bomarsund'—a rather futile undertaking.

These records of another age recall to me the draughtsman, my younger brother, who joined the Navy as midshipman immediately after leaving school, and, as was frequently the case with lads born and bred on the sea coast, had determined from childhood to become a sailor. He first served on the *Phaeton*, a fifty-gun sailing-frigate, the best and fastest of half a dozen which were thought to be the *ne plus ultra* of naval architecture. These must have been nearly the last wooden ships without auxiliary steam. He was afterwards on the *Duke of Wellington*, which was the reason for my being on board that ship during the Review—an experience I am not likely to forget. I used to row out in the morning from Portsmouth to Spithead in a little dinghy (which, attached to the stern of H.M.S. *Duke of Wellington*,

may have looked rather absurd), returning to Portsmouth in the evening. It was during this visit to Portsmouth that I saw in the dockyard a wooden ship, the *Nelson*, with a figure-head representing the great Admiral. She was built after the close of the Peninsular War, had been nearly forty years on the stocks, and was never launched.

My brother next served on a gunboat, the *Geyser*, with the Baltic Fleet under 'Charlie' Napier, whose baggage when he took command was reported to have been limited to a cake of soap and a night-shirt. After the Crimean War my brother was appointed to the Royal Yacht. One of his first duties was the rescue of the tobacco I had smuggled on my way home from Malta, where I had been serving with the East Kent Militia, when he came aboard the transport which was moored in close proximity to the Royal Yacht, and, putting the parcel under the short cloak then worn in the Navy, carried it away to the *Victoria and Albert*, from which I afterwards salved it. He had been some time in the Mediterranean, and seldom passed a notable view or headland without transferring it to his scrap-book, for which Her Majesty would frequently send when there were guests on board the Yacht. Unfortunately, he caught a cold in the Baltic, which, being carelessly treated, settled on his lungs, and he died a short time afterwards while I was absent in America. Had he lived he would undoubtedly have made his mark, for he was devoted to his profession;

besides being, even at that early age, nearly if not quite the best naval draughtsman in the Service. From the date of his entering the Service, I seldom missed visiting him when his ship came home. Once I got leave from Oxford for a week and went down to Hull, where the old *Geyser* had put in for repairs. We amused ourselves driving about the country. One day we found ourselves at Beverley, where I was astonished to see the story of Adam and Eve quaintly told by stone pictures along the roof of the fine old Minster. Some of these statues were in rather a ruinous state. I sometimes wonder if they have since been repaired, or are now considered unsuitable for modern ideas of propriety, or, it may be, for modern belief.

When I was a small boy, I was walking a little way from the beach at Walmer, at low tide, when I heard a strange noise, and saw a queer-looking vessel passing close to the shore. She had two funnels, from which smoke was rising. She was going at what I considered a great pace; and when I got down the shelving beach to the edge of the water, I could only see her in the distance. This was, I believe, the first steamer unassisted by sails. She was called the *Springheeled Jack*, though whether that was truly her name, or only what the sailors called her, I cannot remember.

The change to steam was still in progress, after the Crimean War. At the close of the war,

we, the East Kent Militia, were taken back in the *Etna*, a large iron steamer ; while another regiment, the Fifty-first, was towed behind us in a wooden ship—one of Green's liners.

I find it impossible to recall the glorious days of our old wooden ships without giving a thought to Charles Dibdin, who did so much to steel the hearts of our sailors and to gain for them the honour and glory which they would never have sought for themselves. Many years ago, when I was busily engaged in politics in the Midlands, I sought a brief distraction by holding forth at an inn in one of the most Radical sections of East Worcestershire to the few residents (and voters) who were adherents of the Conservative cause, on Charles Dibdin and his songs. There were present the local sweep—all whose soot I had purchased that year for my wheat—a publican, who may still have considered that beer was the rightful appanage of the Conservative Party, and about a dozen others—rather a shamefaced lot. Doubtless with the view of doing something to conserve the memory of the great musician and song-writer, as well as to assist towards the success of the meeting, the Radicals had arranged that a barrel organ of exceptional power should be brought up by a melodious donkey and stationed in the road exactly opposite the room in which I was speaking. The combined strains were hard to overcome, but I managed to make myself heard.

This was about A.D. 1876. I don't suppose any member of my audience—supposing me to have been audible—with the exception of the chairman, a Baliol double first, had ever heard of Dibdin, who had died as long ago as 1814, was laid to rest quietly at Camden Town, and in whose honour, in 1829—a somewhat long delay—a memorial was subscribed for, which was to be seen, in 1841, in the Veterans' Library at Greenwich Hospital.

On this occasion, after giving as full an account as I could gather of Dibdin's life, I recited some of his best poems—'Tom Bowling,' 'Who cares?' (which the meeting especially appreciated), 'Poor Jack!' and a few others. Surely some of Dibdin's songs are true poems. There are people, no doubt, who will tell you exactly where to draw the line between songs and poems. Songs are often poems; but poets would probably object to any of their effusions being called songs, though no greater compliment could be paid them. Naturally, in such a vast number of songs, all confined to one subject, some of Dibdin's are of inferior quality. Is there any voluminous poet of whom this cannot be affirmed? Dibdin's inferior songs have sometimes too much grog, and quite enough Poll in them; but I suppose these were the two things, next to patriotism and a love of their calling, which attracted the heroes he wished to impress. A ship in full sail was 'a thing of

beauty' (though, alas! not 'a joy for ever'), which can scarcely be said of its superseders. The loss of this beauty, no doubt, accounts for the fact that Dibdin has never had a successor. Our iron ships have been described and praised by writers of every calibre, the fine qualities of our sailors are more than ever appreciated; but it seems to be acknowledged that it is easier, if not more fitting, to write of them in prose than in verse. When there were no more sailing-ships, when 'Hearts of oak are our ships' was no longer true, there could not be another Dibdin. The day for naval poets had gone by. Fortunately, England has not lost the command of the sea—*caret quia vate sacro!*

Dibdin's critics should remember that he wrote under the instruction of the Government, and for a beggarly pittance. It is a wonder that he wrote so well. He is, at any rate, worthy of being remembered; yet the name of Tertaeus is perhaps better known.

The inclusion of some of his best poems in the first series of the 'Golden Treasury' would have been some palliation of our neglect. Another opportunity of doing him late honour occurred on the publication of the second series. This also was allowed to pass. Let us hope that if ever, as it is to be hoped may be the case, a third series is called for, a place will be found for Charles Dibdin.

CHAPTER XII

THE 'RANK AND FILE' IN THE LAST CENTURY

MEMORIES of the Peninsular War stayed with us till quite late in the last century, kept alive at first by officers still on active service—Lord Raglan, who had lost an arm when chief of the Duke of Wellington's staff, at Waterloo, was afterwards Commander-in-Chief in the Crimea —by the survivors of the rank and file scattered about in the towns and villages throughout the country, and later by the frequent notices in the papers of the 'death of a Waterloo veteran'; the intervals between these notices gradually becoming longer, until they ceased altogether. Retired soldiers seem to have a longer lease of life than ordinary mortals. (I remember meeting in a little village on the Illinois prairie, in 1860, an old Russian soldier who had served against Napoleon in the retreat from Moscow, in 1812, and who must have reached a considerable age.) The Duke of Wellington was one of the last to retire from the scene of his arduous and patriotic labours.

The local veteran, if not too generously rewarded by his country, was yet looked on with appreciation by his neighbours. Our representative was a little, wiry old man, who used to walk about the village dragging one leg after him. He was only about five feet five in height, but he made the most of it. His hair was white as snow, and there were many furrows on his withered old cheeks, but it is unlikely that they served—as is supposed to be their office—as channels for tears. He seemed always as merry as a grasshopper. He did odd jobs about the village, here to-day and there to-morrow, and had somehow acquired the position of village gardener, though for this office he had little more aptitude than an old hen. He knew nothing of any business but that of hero, and of this his knowledge, always elementary, had been deprived, by the revolution in the materials and methods of slaughter, of its slight original value. It was his privilege to take things easily, and he sometimes utilised it by leaning on his spade and telling a story. These stories he may originally have invented—as is the custom in the commercial world—after creating the demand.

He lived by himself—his wife, who had followed the Colours, and may have been a heroine in her way, had been dead many years—in a little two-roomed cottage at the end of the village, through the window of which if one peeped in after working hours he might be espied at his

evening meal. He had one chair, and the cat sat on that. He was proud of his talent for sitting on anything that came handy ; though in truth his makeshifts were of the rudest and least ingenious kind. It was much if he could boil coffee if given to him ready ground. He certainly could not have roasted it, but he would have gone without, and no grumbling, or he would have eaten it green. He would live for days on cold boiled broad-beans, which he picked out of a cracked basin with his pocket-knife. 'Saved trouble,' he told you. His dress, except on Sundays, was a patchwork of rags which he mended himself, if mending it could be called. But what did he care for appearances ? 'What though with hoary locks, I must stand the winter's shocks !'

His cold beans and rags served as introduction to recollections of a night spent in the wet rye-fields without fire or anything to eat. 'I was that stiff, sir, in the morning, that I didn't think I could march a mile to save my life, but, bless you, it wore off.' From the moral heights of that rye-field, he could look down on a lord with his twenty thousand a year. Only a common soldier, but with glory enough to retire upon. So we thought, and he was a little of our opinion. But the men who stood firm, when the French devils (as he called them) were riding round the squares, looking for a gap to break in at, were no common soldiers. I met him one day with another old

man taking a cart-wheel to the wheelwright's shop. The two old men were laughing. 'It minds me,' said our hero, 'of them artillerymen trundling the guns into our square.' It seems our gunners at Waterloo, after discharging their pieces when the enemy were upon them, unlimbered the near wheel of each cannon, and retired, rolling the wheel into the nearest square. The French horsemen galloped up and threw ropes prepared for the purpose, like the American lasso, over the gun ; but they could not move it away on one wheel before a deadly volley from the square stretched half of them on the ground, and sent the rest headlong down the slope. This joke never lost its zest for our hero. When we talked to him of the Red Cross, the Ambulance Corps, and the giving of chloroform before operations, he used to smile. 'We never had nothing of them sorts,' he would say ; 'I suppose people's got softer.' We used to shudder at his tales of the wounded lying out for days without help, and then being jolted miles across the rough country in farmers' carts, to some improvised hospital full of indescribable abominations. He would not—perhaps he could not—say whether he had killed anyone ; and I fancy he was no fire-eater, but a simple country lad who had enlisted for glory, and who, when he had 'taken the shilling,' did his duty, following in his humble way in the steps of his Great Commander. His accomplishments

were not many. He could neither read, write, sum, fiddle, nor preach. He was long before the days of Board schools; and perhaps he had the greater confidence in those who led him for the reason that he had no opinion of his own. He had the old-world gift of faith, now obsolete, or, like content, thought to be almost a crime. Poor, unreasoning virtue! and if not in itself heroic, yet, surely, the cause of heroism in others, since faith alone makes it possible for anyone to lead.

He had never been in want; his pension just kept him from that, and the work (so-called) that he did provided for his one luxury—his pipe, that he was never without. What beer he had was given him by an appreciative public. Charity he would never have accepted. He faded away by slow degrees, but it was only three days before he died that he took to his bed. An old woman, some relation of his wife, came in to nurse him. He was leaving little behind him, so she didn't pity him much. He didn't pity himself at all. 'The wonder is,' he said at the last, 'that it wasn't all those years ago.'

We had our wars in the last century, though not equalling in importance the struggle with Napoleon, or the still more determined effort of the Kaiser, now happily concluded—or nearly so—at world domination. Almost immediately after my leaving 'the House,' the Crimean War broke out, and I found myself learning the 'goose-step'

and 'manual platoon' under the eye of a sergeant at the depot of the East Kent Militia at Canterbury. It was but a short time before I was thought capable, with the assistance of a steady young private—promoted for the occasion to corporal—of taking a draft out to Malta, where the regiment was already in barracks. A few days after my arrival, I met in the Strada Reale a well-set-up young fellow in uniform, who saluted me with a broad grin. It was a minute or two before I recognised him for an Oxford 'cad'—so called—one of a few more or less privileged 'tramps,' for the most part a disreputable and ragged lot, who were permitted to stand at Canterbury Gate, and to earn a precarious living by running errands or holding horses for the undergraduates. He was now quite a smart-looking private, a transformation as complete as it must have been speedy. Of course in those days the Army was dependent, as it had been during the Peninsular War, on 'voluntary' enlistment. The farm labourer would slouch into the market town in his smock and heavy boots covered with the local variety of clay, when he would be accosted by the ribbon-bedecked sergeant, and after 'taking the shilling' and imbibing at the latter's expense a quart or two of ale, would become 'a soldier of the Queen.' This without knowing anything of the cause of the war, in what quarter of the world it was to be waged, taking any interest in the sergeant's glib talk of glory,

or with the slightest expectations of finding a Field Marshal's baton—whatever that might be—in his knapsack. In many cases the poor fellow was driven from his village by the pangs of disappointed love, but more often from utter weariness of a sordid and hopeless existence, eked out in some counties on a wage of twelve, or perhaps only nine, shillings a week—an amount still further reduced when the weather was too bad for any work to be continued on the farm, when he would have to sit in his cottage under a leaking roof very likely, and do nothing.

No doubt the sergeant's stereotyped palaver was not quite without effect, but it was probably the beer—to one who, unless a native of one of the cider-growing counties, had not touched a drop of intoxicating liquor for ages—that settled the matter. To remember one's misery no more, is as near as a good many can get, even in these days, to happiness.

One would have thought these poor slaves, broken-hearted as some of them appeared to be, would have had little spirit for fighting ; but, as a fact, they made excellent soldiers, as had been proved in the Peninsular War, and was now to be proved again in the Crimean. It is hard to imagine that they were assisted to enlistment by any feeling of patriotism such as moved the nation as one man to fight the brutal Hun. They could have had no feeling against Russia, and it is

unlikely that the majority had ever heard the name. It was something, of course, to know they would be clothed and fed, and would be able to obey the commandment, which some few of them may have listened to, to take no thought for the morrow. Beyond this there must have been something of the feeling which an Englishman is seldom without, urging them to play the man, and never say die.

The Oxford 'tramp' was of a different species. He was always, no doubt, dirty and ragged, but he had his good days, when some careless undergraduate would chuck him 'half a quid,' and his speedy development into a smart soldier was, if anything, more remarkable than that of the farm labourer.

It was left to the present War, by substituting conscription for the ribbon-bedecked sergeant and his shilling, to bring a different class of men to the colours and so sever the alliance between beer and recruiting. Many years after the Crimean War, I used occasionally to visit a friend of mine who was recruiting-officer for the Navy of a populous district in the Midlands. His office was in a public-house ; the big room where the candidates were examined being decorated with an enormous and soul-stirring stack of pewter pots, and other utensils to assist intoxication, and it must have been hard for the young fellows, after acceptance or rejection, to escape without sampling the brew.

Together with other militia regiments serving in the Mediterranean, we had volunteered for the front, but peace being proclaimed we got no farther than Malta. I have always regretted the sweeping away of the militia—a force which, it seems to me, was worthy rather of being fostered than destroyed. In our shortage of troops, towards the end of the Crimean War, it did good service in garrisoning the Mediterranean, and as a force from which troops could be drawn in considerable numbers for the regular Army it was not without its value. In the present War, with troops counted by millions instead of thousands, it might have appeared ' contemptible,' but it is to be hoped we are not soon to have another war on the same scale, and that we shall never have another little one is, for all the talk about a ' League of Nations,' unlikely.

I confess I should have anticipated our going to the front with more confidence than was the case if our officers had been a little more capable. The colonel was a fine old fellow, an M.F.H. at home, but too good-natured to be a good disciplinarian. The major, though his service had been in a cavalry regiment, may have known something of infantry drill, but the captains were without exception a sorry lot. The captain of my company, a fine-looking fellow enough, was an ex-bagman, and stone-deaf. This last failing was always getting us into hot water with the general,

a peppery old chap, with what was even then an old-fashioned taste for strong language. In vain did our sergeant-major—a splendid fellow who was sent to us from a crack regiment—keep close to his elbow on parade ; in vain did the captain march with head turned towards the rear and curved hand at his ear ; the required information never seemed to reach him. He went on his way regardless of what other regiments were doing, and without seeing that he was leading us on what, in real warfare, would have been the path to destruction.

We returned to England on a big iron ship, the *Etna*, which towed a wooden ship, one of Green's liners, with the Fifty-first Regiment on board. I suppose it was thought that we were less able to resist seasickness than the Regulars, and certainly the latter had a terrible time in the Bay of Biscay. On reaching Canterbury we were disbanded, when the Grenadier company, mostly navvies, splendid fellows, who had enlisted on the completion of the Crystal Palace, appeared on parade without their moustaches, so proclaiming themselves to be once more civilians.

There have been plenty of costly mistakes made in the big War, now supposed to have reached its conclusion ; but I think, having regard to its comparatively small size, that the record of ineptitude in the Crimean War was not easy to surpass. The thanks of the nation were due to the talented

and patriotic war correspondent who exposed some of the worst of these mistakes, though too late to save thousands of lives that were lost through the want of necessary food and clothing. As usual, *Punch* expressed the national feeling on the discovery of what had been going on. There are some still left who remember the cartoon depicting the men shovelling snow from the roof of a house on to the head of the unhappy, but doubtless well-meaning, Prime Minister, walking on the pavement below. 'Cauld kail in Aberdeen!' I was witness, while at Malta, of the reckless waste of everything for the want of which our soldiers in the Crimea were dying. I insert a passage from an article on the Militia, printed in 1906, which tells what was going on, incredible as it may appear to the many who never heard of it.

> 'Perhaps the most wonderful sight to be seen at Malta in those days was the vast stores of good things intended for the soldiers in the Crimea, a considerable portion of which had been to Balaclava, and arrived as far as Malta on the return journey. Perhaps at Balaclava there had been no time to unload them, or the bill of lading may have been mislaid, and to interfere with them in its absence would have been a crime of the first magnitude. Perhaps—but there was then no lack of perfectly proper reasons for doing the most idiotic things, and leaving the obviously

sensible undone. These stores were to be seen heaped high as haystacks around the harbour, and exposed—which certainly in that climate mattered little—to the weather. Cases of port and sherry, champagne, whiskey, potted meats, bales of socks, jerseys, waterproof coats and boots, together with tons and tons of all possible and impossible necessaries and luxuries, lay heaped together in inextricable confusion. What might have been the means of saving thousands of lives if served out to the troops during the dreadful winter season was now only a source of almost irresistible temptation to the sentries. Officers got thoroughly sick of the courts martial necessitated by these peccadilloes, but there was a strong feeling against treating the offenders harshly. What ultimately happened to these stores I never heard. I don't suppose that they are there now, but as an inquiry is now (1906) being instituted into the waste of stores during the South African War, which terminated in June 1902, it would scarcely surprise me to hear of some M.P.—say Mr. McNeill—rising to ask for an account of the stores landed at Malta in 1855, after a fruitless journey to the Crimea.'

CHAPTER XIII

CANADA

WHEN I first crossed the Atlantic, in 1857, I intended staying for some time in Canada West, with a view to eventually settling in the Dominion. It chanced that one of my fellow travellers by the Inman Line was an Old Etonian, who appealed to me with his talk of 'bruzering my dame,' and other pass words. He had evidently spent a good deal of his time in the U.S.A., and urged me to see something of the Prairie States, where, he said, there was any amount of the richest land in the world lying idle, and only needing stocking; while in Canada, I should have to spend the best part of a lifetime in clearing, at the most, a few acres of primeval forest. The Old Etonian left me at Quebec, on his way to Chicago, where he promised to meet me in a few weeks' time, and to give me his assistance as to location and other matters. After spending a few days in Quebec and Montreal and visiting Hamilton, Toronto, and other embryo cities, I went on by easy stages to Chicago, where

I commenced a search for my Old Etonian. He had, however, apparently forgotten all about me, and I never saw or heard of him again. After waiting some days for him to turn up, I started off by myself on the Illinois Central Railroad, then in the embryo state, with my gun and a dog I chanced on, which fortunately proved a very good one, and served me faithfully for several years, during which I had some excellent sport in Illinois and the neighbouring State of Michigan. On this occasion I got south as far as Centralia, and might have been seen one morning at the rude hotel there, hurrying half-dressed after the girl (who would not have liked to be called a housemaid) who was sweeping my boots before her down the long passage, as a rebuke to me for placing them outside my door to undergo the routine as yet unknown to dwellers on the prairie.

The idea of settling in Canada West died gradually, and I saw nothing more of the country than was to be picked up in a few short visits at various times. Colonisation in Canada West was then proceeding in a somewhat leisurely fashion, while in the old settlements about Quebec and Montreal things were almost if not quite stationary. In the neighbourhood of the embryo cities in the West the forest was being gradually driven back, but there were still few manufacturers of any but the cheapest and commonest necessaries. Everything else, even to chairs and tables, was obtained

from the United States or from Europe. The chief, if not the only, export was potash, obtained by burning the trees which had been laboriously cut down by the new settlers. The few bushels of wheat harvested from seed hoed in among the stumps being trodden out in the rude farm buildings by horses, and transported on the farmer's back to a distant mill.

I have always had a feeling of regret that I had not given Canada a fair chance before going to the States. I have fancied that I might have found in Canada friends who would have appealed to me more than those I made in the States ; in fact, men more like Englishmen. But nothing could have been kinder or more generous than the treatment the Americans accorded me during the years I dwelt among them ; and perhaps the one thing that prevents Englishmen from being perfect colonists is that they are always looking out for and desiring something or somebody to remind them of the Old Country, whereas what they should be wanting is a perfect change of men, manners, and customs, without which they might as well have stopped at home.

However, something of this feeling came over me again on visiting St. Paul's one day in 1917, and finding the cathedral crowded with Canadian troops, who were being shown round by the officials. I had some talk with the leader of the party, and had he not been evidently much occu-

pied with his duties I should have asked him to tell me what had happened of late years to the Opeongo Road, though very likely he would have been unable to inform me.

When I was first thinking of going to America a friend, who may have had no very ardent wish to see me again, sent me a newspaper cutting informing intending settlers that they could get 160 acres free of cost on the Opeongo Road, some distance west of Montreal. Going up from Quebec the train stopped at a station labelled 'Opeongo Road'; I looked out with some curiosity, and saw a corduroy road stretching away into the forest. On a small clearing, in close proximity to the station, was a row of about twelve log houses. To each of them was attached a narrow strip of land, carefully fenced off from its neighbour. Here, I suppose, some French Canadian had taken up land years ago; on his death it had been divided, according to local custom, between the surviving members of his family. This would be subdivided again and again, until there would be little room to run a plough between the fences. I did not care for this sort of thing, nor did I feel confident of my ability to hew my road to fortune, literally, with an axe. There were, moreover, no stump-extractors in those days. Some ten years later I passed by Opeongo Road again, coming over from England for a brief visit. The place was exactly

as I had first seen it. Apparently no more settlers had arrived, while none of the old ones had died, and the narrow strips of land had not been again subdivided. Now, sixty years later, the forest has no doubt long since retired, and the Opeongo Road taken its part in the advancement which has made Canada one of England's most prosperous colonies, and enabled her to take a glorious and patriotic part in the Great War.

In 1866, when journeying from New York to Chicago, I came across an elderly American, a favourable type of the old Pioneer class. He seemed to have been everywhere, knew the Southern States well, and had lived some time in South America. He took the first ship loaded with wheat down the lakes to Montreal, after the opening of the Canal. There was no elevator there, and only bushel baskets with which to unload. He went to report the arrival of his ship to some body answering to a Chamber of Commerce, and, following the American rule on entering an office, kept his hat on. They took no notice of him till at last someone said he had better conform to custom and take his hat off. He apologised for making a mistake, but said 'Guess I'll stick to it now.' They continued to ignore him. When he got back to his ship he found Custom House officers on board, sealing up everything. These he drove off, and was then taken into custody and fined one dollar, for which he got a receipt.

He told them they were fools to take so much trouble about a dollar, and that no Yankee would believe it. I suppose he was eventually allowed to unload, but it seemed to me a strange method of welcoming trade.

There was a story going about when I was staying in Hamilton, about 1858, which shows how an old manufacturing country may force a new country into supplying her own wants, and later into exporting and so turning the tables on the old one. The Canadian and American axe was a splendid tool, quite different from the clumsy affair still used by woodsmen in the Old Country. A large order for axes was sent to England, with a pattern. The order was completed by sending back axes of the English type, which the English manufacturer, poor man, doubtless considered far superior to the sample. They were at once returned, and it was said that since that date no more orders for axes had been sent to England. This was one way of helping a new country to take away our trade, and as likely to be successful as any other. It is a good thing for the new country, no doubt, and one is glad to see our colonies become self-supporting, just as one likes to see a son successful when he leaves the old home. Canada can now make her own axes, and a good many other things as well which England used to send her. We may have got sharper since those days, and we shall have to get

sharper still. After this ruinous war we shall want all the trade we can get. But America will be wanting it too, and will get a good deal of it—of course, in quite a friendly way. The great objection I saw to Mr. J. Chamberlain's scheme of Tariff Reform, so far as it meant keeping out foreign goods by putting heavy taxes on their wares, was that it seemed to offer a premium to the slowness and want of energy of our home manufacturers, who would have no need to sharpen their wits if Britons were forced to take whatever was offered them, at any price the maker chose to ask. It would be surely better if our manufacturers were able to find the necessary energy and ability, so that our goods would be purchased because they were not too highly priced considering their make and material.

This will never be the case without foreign competition, though this should not, of course, be allowed to exceed what I will call a healthy amount.

CHAPTER XIV

United States of America in 1857

ON my first introduction to the United States of America, in 1857, slavery was an institution upheld by law, but there were signs that its continuance would shortly be challenged. The territory of 'Bleeding Kansas,' as it was euphemistically called, was attracting crowds of new settlers, supporters of slave-holders or abolitionists, both parties eager to gain the vote of the new State-to-be for its side. John Brown, of Ossawattomie, was still unmartyred; the 'Underground Railroad' was moving thousands of blacks into Canada and the Free States in winter, to their great discomfort. While great cities were rising here and there, the Prairie States, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, &c., were for the greater part as sparsely inhabited as in the days of Cooper's Red Indian. The wooden vessels of the Collins Line were drawn up high and dry near Sandy Hook, and the contest of wood against iron had come to a disastrous finish. The United States had a standing army of a few thousand men, chiefly occupied in looking after the Indian Reser-

vations, and opposing the occasional *émeutes* of such survivors as Sitting Bull, and another chief or two. There were a few seedy-looking half-breeds selling moccasins around the Illinois Central Railroad Depot in Chicago, near which might still have been seen, by anyone who cared to look for it, the old historic log fort, with its marks of Indian bullets. There were no trusts, no sporting estates, and very few were to be found in the Western States who shot flying. There were comparatively few American prose-writers ; but of these, two or three stood out from the rank and file, and were already more appreciated in England than at home. American poets, while not without merit, were inferior to those of older countries, whose classic and hall-marked poems they had made no serious attempt at rivalling. American musicians had struck a new note with their negro melodies, some of which were at least equal to the Scotch and Irish tunes which Burns and Moore had assisted to fame with their immortal poems. American humour was dry and rather grim ; of a quality quite distinct from other varieties. I don't think that wealthy Americans, who were then comparatively few in number, were greatly addicted to it, but as used by the farmers and backwoodsmen I found it delightful.

In a period of about sixty years changes have occurred which, in the case of a duller or less energetic people, would have taken centuries to

accomplish. The long-continued slavery of the imported African race has come to an end, and its place taken by the Trusts, while it is left for a few survivors to tell which was the worse evil of the two. The unsettled Prairie States are now 'full up,' and even in Montana—as was said to me years ago by a disappointed would-be settler—there is scarcely room for a newcomer to slide down the slope into the Pacific. It seems there is already an opening for a new Columbus. The United States are building ships much faster than England, and it looks as if the 'Mistress of the Seas' will soon have to look to her laurels. President Wilson's decision, though come to after a regrettable delay, proves him a not unworthy successor of Lincoln, and instead of a standing army of about 12,000, America is now sending millions across the Atlantic to determine a European war.[1]

American prose-writers have made a great advance not only in quality, but in quantity. Indeed, it seems that for the first time there is a possibility that the world itself will not be able to contain the books that will be written. A few of her army of novelists need fear no rivalry from more than half a dozen or so of English writers. Some of the remainder fail by not realising that a capable and striking description of a mining-camp or a New York interior falls flat after a third or fourth repetition, while American slang soon proves

[1] Written in 1917.

wearisome to educated readers. There has always been a tendency to exaggeration in American virtues and vices. If other people are doing a thing well and quietly the American will try to do it better if possible, certainly more noisily. But if American prose-writers are attempting to change the English language—which, though Waller complained that it was subject to perpetual change—

> 'But who can hope his line shall long
> Last in a daily changing tongue?'

has in reality altered little in the last three hundred years—it must be allowed that we are doing our share of the wrecking, and assisting the more or less rapid approach towards Argot. One day it is Mr. Churchill, I think, with 'meticulous,' which was quite popular for a time, though no one seemed to know the meaning of the word. To-day it is 'camouflage,' which one is quite wearied of seeing in print. So rapidly has the word become prominent that everyone, from Prime Minister to speakers on Trades Union Congresses, uses it on every occasion; so that Mr. Havelock Wilson was enabled to state at Derby, in September last, that 'the four gentlemen who had spoken had been camouflaging each other all the time.' If the speaker had referred to Victor Hugo's masterly survey, in 'Les Misérables,' of the Argot of civilised nations—which book was, of course,

written before the advent of the American variety —he would have discovered the real origin and meaning of the word.

Not content with assisting us to change our language, the Americans are going very near to beating us in melody, and, as might be expected, the American tunes are without any hint of imitation, slavish or other. They came, too, just when they were wanted ; when we had got to the end of our tunes, and had been living on variations for a generation or two. We have still our old melodies, Scotch and Irish, for which we cannot be too thankful, as our source is now dried up. *Tout est dit.* Even with the best of these the American strains compete, not without success, though it will be allowed that the words attached to them are for the most part unworthy of their setting. But Burns and Moore are, and will continue to be, hard to beat. I shall never forget hearing some of the negro melodies played by a local band when I was passing through a prairie village during my first stay in the States. ' Home, sweet Home ' could not have affected me more.

It may seem to some strange that the Americans did not prefer to use these fine tunes for the glorification of a free and enlightened people. But it will be allowed that the sorrows and joys of a captive race, like those of the Jewish captives in Babylon, have been the most touching episodes in the national career.

The change in American poetry since my first visit to America is far less remarkable than in prose. There are, of course, more poets than sixty years ago, but it is doubtful whether the quality shows much improvement. Every reader could then name a few American poets who wrote well and nobly. Even in 1857, striking poems were frequently to be met with in Harper's and other periodicals which must have been the work of true poets. Whether Americans will venture so far as to storm Parnassus, as their troops are now storming the Hindenburg line, and oust quite a number of the present tenants who think themselves secure of immortality, is hard to say; but they may go far towards doing so if they set their minds to it. English poetry has had a start of some centuries, and a stern chase is proverbially a long one. As to an American defeat of English modern poets, it depends entirely on the progress or retrogression of the latter. It is easy to descend, but hard to climb. A few English poets appear to have set themselves the task of wedding English poetry to new metres or to none at all. There are others, too, who appear to consider sense an unnecessary ingredient. The admirers of a style detached from sense and melody will not be very many, or their allegiance of much value. An art built up by centuries of thought and genius is not to be destroyed in a day—by raising, as it were, a jerry-built tenement in front of an old cathedral.

If Americans follow the lead of modern English poets they will have to strip themselves of their humour, and the mantle remaining to them might prove an insufficient garb. It would be better to stick to their last. There is surely an idea among modern English poets that a free use of humour would be little short of a crime. It seems a wonderful dispensation that poets who could make a finer use of it than any class should apparently be themselves so often without the sense of humour. Yet some may have it, and consider it an unworthy attribute for a poet. Tennyson had it in plenty, but he seldom allowed it to peep out. One wishes he had been more appreciative of a gift which was surely intended to leaven what is sometimes rather a heavy loaf. The determination to be serious at all costs, and so keep back the thought that was tickling him, and would have tickled his readers, has, no doubt, spoilt many a poet, who would have gained immensely by letting himself go on occasion. Hood, a true poet if ever there was one, is, on the contrary, an example of too great fondness for humour, much of which was worked up, and not spontaneous. But that only shows that a poet should keep an extravagant sense of humour under subjection, just as carefully as others should avoid hiding it under a bushel, as if it were something shameful and degrading.

For all that there are poets—quite considerable poets, too—who are absolutely without any sense

of humour. To give an instance, I was busy hay-making one summer, many years ago, when a young man came to pay me a visit whom I did not know how to amuse. He was shaping for a poet, and he either couldn't or wouldn't haymake ; so I asked him if he had read Sterne. He said he hadn't, and would like to. So I set him to work, his back against a haycock, thinking he would have a good time, while I went on with my haymaking. I passed him in an hour or so, fast asleep, and Sterne chucked away in the grass. I was aware that there were plenty of things he would not like in Sterne. I don't like them myself —very few people do. But I have always thought that the wonderful humour made up for much that was objectionable, and left something—a good deal—over. Not so my poet. He would not allow poor Sterne any humour, which proved incontestably that he himself had none. There may be Americans of whom this could be truthfully said, but it has not been my lot to come across any of them.

American humour has changed during the last sixty years, at least as much as anything else. All things must have a beginning, but it is hard to say from whence American humour got its start. The Red Indian was too little given to verbosity to have given its origin to any but the grimmest kind of humour. The Dutch—so-called—who form such a large proportion of the population of the

U.S.A., were, and still are, quite without humour, and therefore could not have imparted it. The *Mayflower* could have had but little room in her cargo for it, and the generality of Englishmen are scarcely less wanting in humour than the inhabitants of Germany or Holland. Irishmen and Scotchmen may have assisted at its birth, though the former have for some time abandoned the culture of humour to take up with political bitterness. Perhaps, as two negatives make an affirmative, various degrees of dullness have combined to make one humorous whole. Or it may have 'growed,' like 'Topsy.' It was at any rate a great possession, and it would be well to keep it as far as possible unsoiled. There are, no doubt, plenty of people who get on quite comfortably without a sense of humour. Yet to be without it is to lack the salt of life, to live in a world of which you can never know the joy. Americans are rightly proud of their humour, for which reason, no doubt, they are now treating it like a spoilt child.

Of late years an enormous amount of novels and other literature has been sent to us across the Atlantic: too much of which appears to me to be made up of a clever exposure of the style in which American millionaires live. Exposing the follies of their countrymen across the water is an industry from which it would be more patriotic to abstain. Moreover, a good deal of this is poor stuff, and we

would gladly exchange the lot of it for another volume or two of Hawthorne's careful studies.

During my first stay in America, I saw Lincoln several times: once in 1858, when he met Senator Douglas ('the little giant') in a debating contest in a specially erected wooden building in Chicago. It was then the general opinion that the decision between war and peace would be determined by the event of the contest between Lincoln and Douglas for the Presidentship; as, indeed, proved to be the case. On the occasion of the Chicago debate Lincoln's supporters had provided a surprise—intended, no doubt, to be humorous, but which struck me as quite childish. An enormous log was brought from outside into the hall, on the shoulders of some of Lincoln's supporters. Astride of this log was a figure intended to represent Lincoln, dressed in woodsman's garb, and driving wedges into the log, which the machinery did not, as far as I could see, succeed in splitting. As I said, it appeared to me very childish; but for this I was prepared—the political processions, of which I had seen a good number in New York and elsewhere, being very absurd affairs. Perhaps the way in which politics had been manipulated in the U.S.A. prevented their treatment in a serious or business-like way. These processions were always controlled by a man or two on horseback, embellished by scarves and other paraphernalia, whose efforts were apparently

confined to keeping their seats on the quadrupeds they were no doubt for the first time bestriding. Curiously enough these political outriders were almost the only men I saw on horseback during my stay in the States. No one ever crossed a horse on the prairie. I would often be on horseback for a whole day, looking for strays, but I never met anyone on horseback, with the occasional exception of riders bringing a drove of cattle up from Texas. Of course the Illinois prairie was then unsettled, except for a Dutchman here and there. No doubt people ride in the States now as well as, or perhaps better than, in England.

One of the chief causes of Lincoln's popularity is supposed to have been the fact that he had been a small farmer, and had himself split, or was reported to have split, the rails for the snake fence that surrounded his holding. I am probably correct in thinking that he had not at that date given promise of the great qualities for which he was afterwards noted, and which I should be the last to deny him. I have always thought that if the generality did not look on him during his candidature as a heaven-born, or even a very promising ruler, he was himself weighed down by the forecast of the heavy burden he was fated to bear. I recall his appearance as if it were yesterday: tall, dark-haired, of almost swarthy complexion. I think he was the saddest-looking man I ever saw. Lincoln was not without a

strain of true American humour, but he was chary of his good things, and would not utter a notable and truly humorous saying unless he considered that the occasion deserved it ; and then with only a passing gleam from his dark eyes. This last is a gift that a humorist should daily pray for, but which is too often denied him. I took the greatest possible interest in him from his being a native of the State I was then inhabiting. I considered Senator Douglas his superior as speaker and politician. But the light of these shrinks into insignificance before the glow of true patriotism, and Lincoln was a patriot or nothing.

CHAPTER XV

POLITICAL CHANGES

THERE is little to be said in favour of the way in which political affairs were managed in the country during the Victorian Era, though there was no doubt an improvement on previous reigns. While some of the 'rotten' or 'proprietory' boroughs were done away with, there still remained quite a number of small, unimportant towns returning one, or even two, Members to Parliament, the voters in which looked on a General Election as a sort of 'bonus' year, when their pecuniary wants would, as a matter of course, be attended to, without troubling themselves as to the political views of the candidates, which, it must be allowed, were unlikely to have any good effect on their future. In these places, which were more or less dominated by so-called freemen, no candidate, however desirable, was allowed to acquire the desired addition of M.P. to his patronymic without the disbursement of a considerable amount of money—a contest, however hopeless, being always arranged for.

Once, I remember the leader of a forlorn hope in one of these small boroughs was a little commission agent, who might be seen every market-day with his samples of linseed cake under his arm, by the entrance to the principal inn, and who polled one vote—his own.

It was said, in defence of these boroughs, that they occasionally returned men who afterwards became famous, but whose cause would not have been taken up by the larger and more important constituencies on the look-out for candidates who had already made their mark, and no doubt this had occurred in a few instances. But one swallow does not make a summer. There were in those days instances, which some will be able to recall, of families who from a more or less sentimental wish to retain what they considered a family borough, had been ruined, after being mulcted in £50,000 or £60,000 at one election contest. The custom of profiting by electoral contests obtained not only at parliamentary, but was extended to municipal affairs —the payment to the latter being on a fixed, and necessarily a humbler scale; but, no doubt, half a loaf, or even a slice, was better than no bread. It was said, I believe correctly, of one of the leading men in the Parliamentary Borough of K——, that he once spent the best part of a day standing in an archway leading to a dark passage, with a sack under his arm, from which he doled

out, to all municipal voters who applied for it, five shillings in half-crowns.

The wonderful thing was that their willingness to accept bribes must have co-existed with a certain amount of honesty, since those who took these gratuities at municipal elections seldom disappointed their purchasers. Their failure to 'stand word' in a parliamentary election would have been almost immediately discovered, on the circulation of a little book with their names and that of the candidate for whom they had voted ; besides which it was the recognised custom for the candidate's agent, or someone interested in his success, to go through the polling-booth with the voter whose promise had been given, and hear him name the candidate whom he had decided to honour with his vote and interest, as the phrase went. Many were the sour looks on the faces of the poor fellows who had been more or less coerced into promising, and would have given the other candidate's name if they had dared.

County contests were fought out between Whigs and Tories—the former already beginning to be in bad odour, and approaching the day when they would save their existence only by dubbing themselves Radicals—who hated each other venemously, though the difference between their political opinions was only on occasion fundamental, the chief divergence—certainly of no slight importance—being that one party was possessed of the

loaves and fishes which the other was striving to acquire.

In counties the issue was frequently decided rather by the age of the family tree than by the novelty or consistency of a candidate's opinions. This was, at all events, the case in Kent, where to-day none of the old names—Knatchbull, Dering, Deedes, and another or two—are found in the list of M.P.'s for 1919. At these contests the lowest class of non-electors were accustomed to figure as disturbers of the peace, more, I feel sure, from their innate rowdyism, and a love of what they considered sport, than from any objection to the candidate's political views.

My first vote for a parliamentary candidate was given in the 'fifties at an election at Ramsgate, to elect an M.P. for the Cinque Ports Division, and it was then that I was witness to a curious custom in favour with the populace—none of whom were then voters—which would have been more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The Division had been held by a scion of the Knatchbull family, one of the oldest in Kent, and it was reported that at some far-away time one of the females of the family on hearing that the lower classes were complaining that the high price of meat made it impossible to obtain any, had asked why they did not eat bullock's liver. In consequence it had become the custom to bring large consignments of bullock's liver into the town

before the day of election ; but not, as might be supposed, for consumption as a new and hitherto unappreciated edible. The populace armed themselves with willow wands, tapering towards the end. From the point of these would be flicked, in the direction of a prominent Conservative, easily distinguished by his orange-and-blue rosette, a small piece of bullock's liver. The missiles were so skilfully propelled, that it is probable that some practice had preceded the election day ; and, no doubt, with annual or triannual Parliaments, the aim would have been still deadlier. When these missiles had been picked out of the gutter several times, contact with them became increasingly undesirable.

Old customs die hard. It is only a few years ago that at an election to return a Member for Thanet, in place of the greatly respected Jimmy Lowther, I found the correspondent of the *Standard* noticing the use of ' hard missiles, apparently of dry mud.' These would, no doubt, have been found, on closer inspection, to have been no other than the time-honoured bullock's liver.

Absence from England for some years prevented me from voting again at an election till in the 'sixties, in South Shropshire, I found rabbit-skins taking the place of the Kent missiles. Sir Baldwin Leighton, who had been for some years a useful Member of Parliament for the Division, had prosecuted his keeper for selling game, and

this was converted into a refusal to let the man have a rabbit for the family dinner, though his wife was in a state of health requiring this special nourishment. As a fact, the majority of keepers' families in those days would have starved before partaking of the familiar and not inodorous coney. However, when Sir Baldwin went to meet his constituents he was attended by a yelling mob who pelted him with rabbit-skins. The cry was taken up by the farmers, who were then subject to be eaten up by game and rabbits, and were no doubt delighted at the slaughter which was necessary to keep up the supply of missiles. In the expectation that Sir Baldwin, after having lost the election, would nevertheless attend the declaration of the poll at Church Stretton, a crinoline covered with rabbit-skins was prepared which was to have been dropped over his head when he came forward to speak on the hustings, in illustration of his having been extinguished by rabbits. But he had the good sense to keep away. This was perhaps the most successful election cry that I remember, and certainly the most unfair.

Its usefulness having been recognised, the trick soon became common of circulating a false and damaging statement on the eve of an election, when there would be no time or opportunity of contradicting it. I fear it is true that Radical candidates were the first and practically the only ones to avail themselves of it. Even in 1918

there have been found some to continue a dishonourable practice. But the voters are, fortunately, less credulous than of old.

The passing of the Ballot Act dealt a much-needed blow to bribery in the smaller boroughs. It put a stop also at once to coercion in the county constituencies, which had always (except in a few exceptional areas) been too large for systematic bribery to be possible. It was perhaps expected that it would entail secrecy as to the vote given. As a matter of fact there has been very little. Even during the continuance of the South African War few people dreamt of concealing their opinions, though those who opposed the war had to undergo a very unpleasant and even dangerous experience. There are, of course, numbers of people whom nobody would believe, in ordinary matters, on their oaths. But, somehow, when a man lies—which I think is very seldom—about his political opinions or intentions, there is always in his manner something to give him away. Even should he take you in at first he is sure, from sheer pride, to blurt out the truth in a confidential moment.

The ballot, at any rate, made it impossible to 'put on the screw.' It put an end to the days when the landlord, when letting a farm, reserved to himself the tenant's vote as if it were another and less elusive description of game.

When the late Mr. J. Chamberlain's opinions were supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be verging

on Republicanism, with a leader of the new Republic-to-be not impossible to guess at, a new landlord, whose politics were unknown, came to the chief inn of a locality in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, with the politics of which I was intimately concerned. It was necessary to discover whether the new-comer was friend or enemy, since his was the house chiefly favoured for Conservative meetings and banquets. On several occasions the man was interviewed, but appeared disinclined to go into the question of politics. At last a prominent Conservative ventured to ask him point blank, 'What are your politics, anyhow?' After a little humming and hawing, the new-comer looked his interviewer in the face, and broke out with 'I'm a Republican, I am!' thus finally settling not only the question of his politics, but of his income. We know little what dreams of self-exalting or glory the apparently innocuous or even useful politician may be veiling from us with a smiling or a careless brow, and even the more harmful would probably move us rather to derision than anger.

In the 'sixties the opinion became general that the choice of candidates for the Division should no longer be left to two or three so-called county magnates—who were sometimes not even politicians—but to the voters themselves. The change was not effected without the arousing of a little ill-feeling, which, however, soon passed over. Votes were now granted—rather late in the day—to

the agricultural labourers. It was found that the withholding of the franchise (proving, as it did, distrust of a class than which none was more honest or deserving) had created a soreness which it took a long time to remove.

For many years the toast of 'Church and State' had taken precedence at local Conservative gatherings, even of 'Success to Agriculture.' Its removal in favour of 'Ministers of all Denominations' was due to the increasing importance of the dissenting element, and may have veiled a hope that some of the ministers would return the compliment by assisting the Conservative cause. Later the toast was dropped altogether, and the alliance —supposing it to have existed—between 'Church and State' may be said to have ended. There had been an opinion that parsons were, equally with the brewers, useful allies to the Conservative cause, and a good many parsons used, in old days, to advertise their Conservative views—no doubt from the expectation of a reward. I always found parsons a nuisance at elections; and I remember being once told, when I was canvassing some farmers, that if the parsons did not keep quiet they—the farmers—would not vote at all. I had long felt that 'Church and State' had the effect of steeling the Radicalism of the Dissenters, who but for this alliance might have been able to see that a Conservative Government might be good for them as for others. No one will profit

more by the demise of 'Church and State' than the parsons themselves. It may make men of some of the cringing toadies whose cry is 'Give, give!' or, rather, it may perhaps send them to use their arts of adulation elsewhere. The old-fashioned honest parson might be seen once more among us, to the disgust of the men who look on preferment to a country living not as a stepping-stone to usefulness, but to greater emolument, and whose success (for who can resist the untiring sycophant?) means the neglect and defeat of honest men.

Well, 'Church and State' has gone the way of other things perhaps more fitted to survive, or, at least, it only lingers in a few country parishes whose fortunate inhabitants—*sua si bona norint*—hear little of the dissensions, soon to become more pronounced, in the Church, or of the infidelity which would make the alliance in its old form a shame and an absurdity. Bishops and deans may feel confident, rectors and vicars may fondly imagine, that the alliance still endures; but to others signs of the divorce have long been apparent. And if it had its good points, if it was better that 'Church and State' should be allied than that the nation should have no religion at all, yet it had its weak points too; and the chief of these may have been that it caused the parson to look on himself as a capable politician, to the neglect of the higher duties to which he had been appointed.

CHAPTER XVI

A LAPSED OFFICIAL

PUTTING the recent War Election out of consideration, I am unaware that there is now any special method of introducing a candidate to a constituency to which he is unknown. If he has had the means and foresight to subscribe liberally to the party funds, he may be chosen for a division in a pleasant neighbourhood, where he may have a fine chance of success. Otherwise he will have to win his spurs by leading a forlorn hope in the Black Country, or trying his 'prentice hand on some dull agricultural constituency. Imagine the feelings of a retired London merchant or financier whose knowledge of the country began and ended with the fact that it is green turned up with brown, on his first glimpse of the new territory-to-be! He has very likely no eye for the picturesque, and as he gazes out of the windows of the railway carriage the place does not appeal to him at all. To his London-bred eyes it looks anything but up to date. There are no motor-buses at the station, and the sight of a mouldy-

looking 'fly' or two comes as an unpleasant surprise. There are but few people on the platform, and it would require more imagination than he possesses to put them down for a deputation. He wonders what he had better do, and ends by strolling off disconsolately through the mud towards the offices of the local firm of lawyers who he has been told are accustomed to act for his party at elections.

Forty years ago he would almost certainly have been accosted on alighting from the train by a quiet-looking, middle-aged man with an air of breeding differentiating him from a prosperous farmer, who, introducing himself as Mr. So-and-so, would have carried him off to the proper hotel, and given him, after lunch, full particulars as to the state of affairs. The candidate might have considered his host's get-up and manners too countrified, but if he was wise he would not have allowed this to appear. He would soon have discovered that his new friend was a fair judge of men, especially with regard to their value for political purposes ; and the outcome of the scrutiny to which the debutant was about to be subjected would have a good deal to do with the latter's success or failure.

Whether for good or ill the type is no longer to be met with. It has become the fashion to send down spouters from headquarters, very often quite ignorant of the wants, and, worse still, of

the prejudices which do so much towards influencing country voters. The country politician made local politics his hobby, and he was permitted, since others were absorbed in more remunerative occupations, to take upon himself the trouble of introducing a new candidate to the constituency, and looking after him sometimes from the day of his arrival to the declaration of the poll. Like the majority of country folk, he was always a good sportsman, but such trifles as hunting and shooting were made contributory to, instead of being allowed to interfere with, his ruling passion. He had been known to give up his chance of a good start from the most promising covert in the country that he might potter about in the ruck, and so satisfy his anxiety as to the politics of a new arrival in the neighbourhood, and to miss or omit to put up his gun at a woodcock that the man on his left hand, whose vote was uncertain, might have an easy shot. He was an example of the men, still occasionally to be met with, whose every moment seemed occupied, yet who are always asking for more work. This characteristic was seldom allowed to lie dormant, and in addition to his self-imposed task he found himself saddled with a varied assortment of duties on quite a number of boards. These he accepted willingly, if without enthusiasm, since they brought him into contact with people who might one day be useful to him in his political rôle. In the course

of time it came to pass that there was scarcely anyone in the Division with whom he was not—owing to his inability, as it seemed, to take offence—on good terms. Not that his hobby was all work and no play; and, no doubt, he got sufficient amusement out of his clients to prevent Jack from becoming a dull boy. If he seldom met with a candidate whom he considered satisfactory—and it must be allowed that his ideal was rather high—he never allowed himself to show his disappointment. The foolish equally with the capable was welcome to the best advice he had at command, and the former, if he gave the more trouble, was not infrequently the more interesting. If the candidate sometimes wondered that a stranger should take so much interest in his career he put it down, naturally enough, to his own taking personality. It was rather a shock to discover, after some weeks of what appeared to be a friendship, that his mentor did not care a straw for him except as a possible vote for his pet statesman—the man who stood to him above all others, and without whose inspiration his labours would have been dreary indeed.

By nature too honest for the job, the country politician acquired, in the course of time, no little of the wisdom of the serpent, and knew well what topics were fitting for discussion at a meeting of farmers, and of what to suggest the omission or slurring over in the towns. He may have been

originally a bit of an epicure, but he learnt to swallow, without making a wry face over it, a good deal that he did not enjoy. He never made any pretention to oratory, and the pretence is as near to this accomplishment as the great majority of speakers ever arrive. Occasionally, when no titled members of the party were present, he found himself forced to make something in the neighbourhood of a speech ; even then he managed to confine what he called his ' remarks ' to a few pithy sentences which frequently contained more practical wisdom than the laboured orations of the young men with the gift of the gab who were taking up politics as a profession. These were then beginning to make their appearance ; there are now shoals of them everywhere. Few men of any capacity can constantly brood over a difficult problem without arriving at a better judgment of it than is permitted to outsiders who have scarcely given it a thought, and he got in his rough way to be very wise. The result of his careful study was sometimes put down for intuition—and, indeed, intuition is seldom much more. He seemed aware of coming disaster, while others saw no hint of danger in the cloud no bigger than a man's hand.

What pangs he underwent of grief and disappointment ! Of anger, too, when the victory on which he had counted was snatched away by the folly of some blatant outsider over whom he had no control. Yet he had his triumphs, and

some of them so unexpected that he learnt never to despair. And who will deny that the secret of success is to work on as if sure of victory? Measures concerned him very little ; his business was to assist in keeping together a party capable of putting them through. It was useless, he thought, to bring forward a policy that would temporarily destroy the only party interested in carrying it. Get your party first, he would say, and then bring in your measure. Moreover, to insist too loudly on the merits of any particular policy while in opposition, was to ensure it being taken up (when its advantages have been made patent) by your opponents, who would live for years on the loaves and fishes which, given a little patience, would have ensured you a square meal. What he hated more than anything was the game, even then coming into vogue, of political cribbage. The party that, without any regard for principles, pegged a few holes in front of the adversary in order that it might secure a brief tenure of office, had to pay in the end far more than it received.

Politics were everything to him, in that they frequently left him little else. He may have had some turn towards Art, or—droll as it sounds—towards Poetry, but he had no time to spare for either. It is doubtful whether what is called Society had any charms for him ; what he enjoyed was to talk politics with two or three friends, in his study, over a pipe. Outside politics, he kept

a good deal to himself. He may have been aware that a growing inability to talk or think of anything but politics made him a bore at purely social functions ; as it was, skin-deep politicians thought him one, even at political meetings ; and it must be confessed that he may sometimes have taken himself too seriously. He had a certain position, no doubt, and came temporarily into touch with the big local men, who while grateful to him for saving them trouble yet treated him a little *de haut en bas*. After his lifelong labours, which were only unprofitable because he neither asked for nor would have accepted any reward, he would see his friends and neighbours getting rich—or, at any rate, making some provision for the future—while he got poorer ; it was as possible then as now to spend money on politics without being a candidate. But if he occasionally doubted whether the game was worth the candle, he was generally one of the happiest of men. When he was getting old, and perhaps a little cynical, he may have seen, or thought he saw, that the securing by enthusiasts of salaries or office for a few men whose ambitions have taken a political turn was often a waste of time and energy, since some, at any rate, of the beneficiaries would have been more suitably employed in selling wines, or in the manufacture of motor-cars ; that without these—which, it is to be feared, are more likely to be increased in the future than diminished or done away with—all

matters concerning the well-being of the Empire might be settled with more dignity than at present, and with less sound and fury. What he would have said, or thought, on hearing Conservatives advocating the payment of M.P.'s (and subsequently, no doubt, the subsidising of all local officials from chairman of Quarter Sessions to members of already peculative Boards of Guardians), can only be imagined.

One trouble he had, and the more his influence grew the greater it became. He was pestered by streets of people who wanted to get something from him : generally his certificate for appointment to the County Bench, already inconveniently crowded. From these eager suppliants he would take refuge behind the Lord Lieutenant, who, if he chanced to be a sensible man, would manage to delay matters by promising to 'consider' the recommendation which he knew had been grudgingly given. 'Luck's a lord,' and anticipated troubles occasionally fail to eventuate. Sometimes death put the unwelcome aspirant *hors de combat*, or a favourable answer became, for some reason or other, impossible. To pressure the Lord Lieutenant could always reply, 'Well, I'm considering it, ain't I ?'

The country politician has had his day, and perhaps he was not fitted to survive. His ministrations, now discontinued, were almost entirely confined to the Tory party, since there were few

politicians on the other side to whom the unsalaried office would have offered any attraction. Political enthusiasm of the old sort is dead, or dying. The old Whigs were, wisely perhaps, Gallios, and the small remainder of them have developed a capacity for facing both ways. There are few statesmen for whom it seems worth while to be zealous, and the ways in which political contests are too frequently carried on would have moved him rather to disgust than enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XVII

SEVEN YEARS ON THE SALOP CLAY

RETURNED from America, I found the family scattered all over the country. My dear sailor brother was dead. I had gained little experience in the States to assist me in farming in England, but had before picked up a good deal from my frequent visits to my father's agent, a noted farmer who held some of the best land in the Isle of Thanet. I realised, however, that my amount of acquired knowledge would not go very far, so, with a view to improvement, took up with a farmer in Norfolk—a member of a great farming family who, altogether, had about 7000 acres in close proximity to one another. In those days, taking farming pupils was quite a fashionable business in Norfolk and in the Lothians —supposed to be the best farming districts in Great Britain. These men did excellent service in teaching the rudiments of their art to young fellows of good family against the day when they would succeed their fathers in the management of the family estates. There are few now to undertake

this duty, fewer still perhaps who desire any knowledge of the sort. There was certainly never a time when it was more needed.

A brother-in-law of my friend farmed 2000 acres, mostly light land, and had generally about eight pupils, who paid £200 a year, and for each of whom a horse was kept. Champagne was frequently on the board at dinner-time, and I confess I did not see that a large portion of the £200 would remain in the pupil-teacher's pocket. After breakfast the pupils mounted their hacks, and went out to learn farming. There was a good deal of larking over fences, sometimes a race round a hundred-acre field that was in preparation for swedes, and made excellent going; and those who shirked their farming lessons had, at any rate, opportunity for learning to ride.

I stayed with my farmer for some time—my age being, I imagine, a record for a farming pupil—and had the advantage of visiting the farms held by his brothers and father. The Norfolk farmers were then a fine hospitable race. It was farmers, farmers everywhere, and they seemed the only people in the streets of Norwich, with the exception of a few parsons, on market days. It was the custom when one of them wished to entertain on a big scale, to take the village inn for the day. These inns were quite above the common, and always possessed a good bowling-green. To this an adjournment would be made after dinner, and

I got to be quite a fair performer. Trying my hand, the other day, I found I had forgotten the A B C of the game.

I have not visited Norfolk for many years, and have heard nothing as to how that great farming family came out on the arrival of bad times. They were of a sort that might be expected to weather the storm, and worthy of surviving. The father, I heard, was given notice to leave his farm of 1000 acres because he employed less labour in winter than his landlord thought advisable—a procedure not likely to be adopted in 1918.

By the time that I had absorbed a good portion of the information my tutor had at his disposal, I was getting anxious to farm on my own. It was a disappointment to find that it would be hard, if not impossible, to get a really good farm. None of those who were settled on good farms were likely to resign in my favour, and on their demise they would be succeeded by men whom the owner had known since his boyhood, and who looked on having the refusal as a right, even if there had been no actual promise. There were plenty of farms to be had, but all, or almost all, stiff land, of which the best farmers and those with most capital were already beginning to fight shy.

I nearly took a big farm in Essex, then a great wheat-growing county, its clay not so stiff but that it can be ploughed with two horses, G.O., to a depth of nine inches. What is Essex now?

A county of poor, wet pasture, where the late growers of wheat have erected at the corner of the unstocked fields a small house as a sample, with an advertisement in front, 'This land to be let for building.' The same notice meets the eye again after passing a few more fields. The jerry-builder is a great man, no doubt, but to build over a whole county at a moment's notice, even at so short a distance from London, is a task beyond his powers.

After visiting quite a number of farms, I got more and more anxious to settle down, and one day leased a farm of 400 or 500 acres in Salop, between Bridgnorth and Ludlow—a district still called 'the Wheatland,' though it has ceased for over forty years to deserve the name. This action did not then argue such a vast amount of folly as it would to-day. The Salop clay takes more kindly to grass than some other varieties, which only do so under protest. Wheatland farmers were enabled to eke things out by breeding Shropshire sheep, which were then greater favourites than at present, and Hereford cattle, which if they could not be finished at home would be eagerly purchased by their neighbours who farmed the swede and barley lands on the other side of the Severn. The late tenant's failure was explained to me as due to his refusal to fallow for wheat, and this may have been so far true that setting one's self against local customs which have been

built up by experience (of Virgil, for instance, and Job—the greatest gentleman farmer of antiquity—and a few others), seldom leads to success. The advice given to me by acquaintances, of whom I speedily had a good number, was to fallow. 'Never you go trying that brush-wheat like . . . . did. 'Twas that as broke him.'

The farm, of course, was out of condition, my predecessor having held it a year or two longer than he should have done, and he consented to act as my bailiff for a time. He did no harm. Many a man who fails in his own affairs can succeed in managing other people's. But, after a few weeks, he drifted away to work at a brewery, where, if he did not get richer, he at any rate got fatter.

During the seven years of my stay here I saw the gradual passing away of the old farming methods that had been so familiar to my boyhood. The introduction from America of mowing, reaping, and steam threshing-machines quickly did away with the use of the scythe and the flail, both of which implements almost all agricultural labourers could use with more or less skill. I had myself at first to lend a hand at raking the sheaves off the reaping-machine, as none of my men cared to undertake the job, till my shepherd came forward and showed symptoms of a latent mechanical genius. I had, of course, seen these machines in the States, where every farmer of 160 acres had his own reaper and mower. But

I remember being rather surprised, on revisiting America in 1868, at finding my tenant tramping out his wheat with horses in the barn in biblical style. It was naturally in America, where labour in the prairie states was so scarce as to be practically unobtainable, that these labour-saving machines had their origin, gradually lessening the demand for agricultural labourers in England, and so assisting the exodus from the country to the towns. While there were farmers who for a few years declined to use the reaping-machine, holding that they wasted more of the crop than hand labour, I was myself, two or three years after going to Salop, grateful to the flail for getting me out of a serious difficulty.

One very hot harvest-time everything ripened at once, and before I could get to the beans they were 'sheeding,' as it was locally called. The Welshmen, who were cutting the wheat with the 'broad hook,' were turned into the beans at dawn, and continued there till the sun got hot, when the beans dropped out wholesale, and the men returned to the wheat. In this way I gradually got the beans cut, and the next thing was to carry them. Luckily it came on to rain, and we set to work to carry them to the three sets of farm buildings which were used for feeding young cattle in the winter. Then the men brought out their flails, for some time unused, and set to work, two in each barn, and the beans came out dry as shot.

It was not long before the reaping-machines put a stop to the visits of the Welsh and Irish reapers, who annually left their homes to assist at the English harvest. The Welshmen, with their broad hooks, were splendid fellows, and could cut about three-quarters of an acre a day. The Irish, of whom there was a colony in almost every agricultural town, used the 'saw-sickle,' with which, by working almost night and day, they could manage about half an acre per day. They would move leisurely about till they had secured a handful of corn, which they would deposit on the spot selected for the sheaf, and then start on another journey. They left the stubble high, which was the chief reason for their employment. On farms where but few roots were grown this stubble would often be the only cover for birds. On the introduction of reapers the birds, instead of lying like stones, began to run up the field as soon as the sportsmen appeared at the gate. The Irishmen's sheaves would be only a few inches high, and when these were at the top of the rick and the machine clogged, it was possible to imagine that you had a record crop, till you were undeceived on arriving at the Welshmen's work lower down. It is remarkable that the attempts by English makers of agricultural implements to improve on the machines brought across the Atlantic were generally failures. There was one, I remember, a reaping-machine, which the horses pushed from

behind instead of pulling, which it was very amusing to watch at work, as you passed through the country by train, till it was rather suddenly withdrawn.

It cannot truthfully be stated nowadays that there is nothing new under the sun. At any rate, there is nothing new about 'small holdings.' Something was known of this matter fifty years ago. I laughed when politicians brought it out more recently as a new idea. There were quite a number of 'small holdings' in Shropshire in the 'sixties; but as the tenants on these were carefully selected men on holdings specially located, the clamorous advocates of 'small holdings' everywhere for everybody had certainly some claim to originality. There were three 'small holdings' on my farm; and my landlord, who had farmed the property himself for many years, told me to do as I liked as to giving them notice. It never entered my head to do so. Two of the three were brothers, valuable men, who did all the fencing and most of the tack work on the farm. There never were better workmen anywhere. One of the brothers held seven acres of grass, with a good house and garden, for which he paid £15 per annum. He kept pigs, and always reared a calf or two. His wife was a strong, hard-working woman. They had no children, and always seemed well-to-do. The brother had thirteen acres, partly plough, a delicate wife, and a number of small

children. His rent was £33. He had to pay for horse hire, and was always behindhand, though sober and industrious. He did better when he gave up the land, as he could always get high wages. His place was taken by an ex-farm bailiff who had saved a little money. The other 'small holder' had a very good house and a few acres of grass. He was a shoemaker, and quite well off. It is absurd to advocate 'small holdings' for capable and incapable, sober or the reverse, and on any sort of land. Many people imagine that all soils are alike, and require similar treatment. A good and industrious workman, in the same circumstances as the first of the three I have mentioned, would get on as well now as fifty years ago. The difficulties to-day would be to find the good workman, and then the good neighbourhood for him to work in.

My first year on the farm was anything but a prosperous one. The weather during harvest-time was the worst I have ever known, and it was impossible to carry anything in even tolerable condition. A neighbour who farmed about four hundred acres, chiefly arable, did not harvest a sheaf of corn. The wheat grew together till the shocks were a solid mass. The oats, untied, were reduced to little black heaps which, stirred by the foot, bore the appearance of soot. The landlord must have come forward with assistance, for the tenant went on as if no serious calamity had

occurred. I had only thirty acres of wheat ; I carried it in bad condition, and was glad to have done so when it set in to rain heavily. I should never have had another chance. There was then two years of ups and downs, both bad for corn, but fairly good for sheep and cattle. In one of these years I paid a short visit to the States, intending to dispose of some farming land in Illinois, but I came back without selling it. Land in the States was quickly rising in value ; the U.S.A. were daily requiring more corn for their own use, and the day when they would want it all was rapidly approaching. Yet this was the time for us to choose for giving up wheat-growing in England.

In 1860, when the rinderpest devastated Cheshire and other counties, we were lucky in getting off with a scare. On the neighbouring estate of Aldenham, Sir John, afterwards Lord Acton, had just engaged a new agent from Norfolk, who had had no experience of saffron—autumn crocus—which came up luxuriantly in springtime. Thankful for what he considered an early bite, he had a lot of young cattle turned into it. These were taken ill, and the Government Inspector, thinking he scented rinderpest, ordered the whole lot, of fifty or sixty, to be incontinently poleaxed.

After my third year things began to look up. In 1867 wheat rose to 11*s.* 4*d.* the bushel of 70 lb. The following year it was at 8*s.* ; while

wool, though not as high as it had been, fetched 1*s.* 7*d.* per pound.

From a financial point of view, the annual wool fair held at Bridgnorth in June, was one of the chief excitements of the district. Buyers used to attend from Bradford and the wool-consuming towns, while some of the leading firms were locally represented. There was a good deal of jealousy among the buyers which local shrewdness was not unable to utilise. The man who had bought your previous clip was apt to put in a claim to the new one. He had, however, to defend his position against numerous rivals, and the appeal 'You won't leave me for a halfpenny?' was not always convincing. His last year's client would stray across the street from buyer to buyer, returning at intervals to his old friend to inform him how much he would have to rise. The market had to be carefully watched, or suddenly, as it seemed, all the interest was gone, and you and your wool were left out in the cold. You would then have to look after a customer, instead of a customer coming down specially to look after you. I have known large sums lost by a determination not to sell under a certain price: notably, a Kent hop-grower who might have had close on £20 a pocket, and afterwards sold for 50*s.* We had a big farmer and cattle-dealer who in 1864 could not get quite half a crown per pound for his wool, and decided to hold it. Next year wool fell in price, and in the

following year to a little over 1*s*. Then it was, 'You don't suppose I am going to sell now, when I might have had half a crown!' Years after, the wool was still lying in a warehouse at Wolverhampton, 10,000 fleeces or so, rotten and damp, torn to pieces by rats, and practically unsaleable. Yet this was a man whose judgment in farming matters was considered infallible!

Two nuisances had to be guarded against by the Wheatland farmers, or the whole district would have speedily been devoured: these were rats and rabbits. One year I stacked my wool in the granary as usual. It had only been there a few days when the agent came to weigh it. We found the wool already colonised by rats, which must have come in from all parts of the country on hearing of the comfortable arrangements I had made for them. The agent, I thought, looked a bit shocked, so I took him into the house for a bottle of claret, while the men stopped all the holes by which the rats could escape. Then we got my terrier, a little brindled bitch—the best ratter I ever had—and began to move the wool. We killed thirty or forty, and the agent enjoyed himself immensely, and said not a word about damages. A week or two afterwards the horses were kept in by wet weather, and going out as usual before breakfast, I found the wagoner engaged in carrying pails of water into the cart stable. It appeared that after the tragedy in the granary the

survivors had sought another domicile. This time they had burrowed underneath the corn-bin, through the bottom of which they had effected an entrance. The bin was moved, and the men were emptying buckets of water into this hole, and several others recently made. I was just in time to see the *dénouement*. The rats were coming out of the holes, blinded and half-drowned, and were easily accounted for. My wagoner was delighted, thinking he saw his way to prevent depredations in future. The rats were left in peace for some weeks to restore confidence, and I went out one morning to see them drowned again. This time the water was wasted, not a solitary rat making his appearance. Having before neglected to provide an exit, they had now profited by the experience, and we had to revert to the ancient methods of destruction, to which they only occasionally succumbed.

Rabbits were even a greater nuisance than rats, though they did a good deal towards paying the labour bill in winter. Without careful treatment they would have eaten everything on the farm. Rabbit-shooting on another man's land is an agreeable pastime; but while you soon get to loathe the little beasts as food, to be eaten up by them is even worse. This was the fate of many a good fellow in my day, where on certain estates it was not a question of how long you would last, but how soon you would be ended. In my first

year the rabbits must have recognised that I was a novice, and they unwisely cleared off four acres of oats in the spring, before I was aware of them. This put me on my mettle, and they never did me much damage afterwards. Some of my land was well suited to beans, which the little varmints wouldn't touch. When they began work on the wheat, I would put down a hundred traps or so along the cover side, which sent them off, more frightened than hurt, to the beans. There they would stop, keeping down the weeds, till hunger overcame their fears, when the traps came into use again.

I found the life a strenuous one. No one had yet dreamt of motors, and the drive to Shrewsbury Cattle Market and back, close on fifty miles, was a tiring one when the cob, *pro tem.*, chanced to be a bit slow. Then there was Ludlow, thirty-five, and Wolverhampton forty miles. In the season there was plenty of shooting, with hunting two, and sometimes three days a week when the Albrighton met within reach, cricket in the summer with several Christ Church men in the team, one of whom had played in the Oxford and Cambridge —he never got any runs with us, and I suppose the bowling was not good enough for him—and always above and before everything the farm. Very little time left, one would think, for intellectual pursuits, but I managed to do some reading and also some writing. Characters swarmed in

the village and in the neighbouring country. There was a good supply of native humour, and that got one through a wet season.

After the rise in wheat, which many good judges thought likely to last, Wheatland farmers were in high spirits. My farm was greatly improved ; some poor plough land that I had seeded down had got into good pasture, and some of the wet fields had been drained—I wonder if the outlets have ever been seen to since, but think it likely that no one is aware of them. The shooting, too, had improved, and I had quite a lot of pheasants about. My lease was running out, and I looked forward to renewing it. But my landlord was in a bad state of health, and, wishing to get rid of the property, gave me, as he was entitled to do, a year's notice. He sold the farm to a Scotchman, who at once parted with the best portion, and started farming on the remainder. I heard that he had a disastrous time. He was a little too ' cannie,' and refused to pay anything for the land I had laid down, so I ploughed it up, about seventy acres in all, and got two crops of wheat off before leaving it for him to seed down again.

The amounts of corn and cattle sold during my tenancy varied considerably from year to year. No doubt, if I had been as capable as some of the Wheatland farmers, I should have done better. In 1865—a bad year for wheat—the sales of

sheep, lambs, and wool reached £1000 ; in 1866 (the rinderpest year), £1200 worth of fat cattle were sold ; in 1867, sales of wheat alone came to £800 ; and in 1868 to over £1000. If things in the clay district were no worse than this now, in 1918, the amount of shipping required to bring us our wheat would be considerably reduced, and it seems possible that the submarine campaign would never have been undertaken.

Later, when wheat-growing was suddenly relinquished on the stiff clay, it looked as if I had had a narrow escape, but I have often wondered if I could not have held on. I might even have escaped the sheep-rot a few years later, when so many farmers lost the whole of their flocks. My neighbour in Worcestershire nearly broke his heart, going out in the morning and finding fifteen or a score of ewes lying dead. He said to me one day, ' You may think me a fool, but when I see them lying about dead I cry like a child.' I did not think him a fool ; I could understand his feelings only too well.

Two years ago I went down into Shropshire to look at the old place, and see how it had got on in all these years. I knew it was impossible that it could have prospered, but I hoped to find things better than in Sussex, where wheat growing had been given up for forty years, and a great deal of land was practically derelict.

Turning out of the high road from Bridgnorth

to Ludlow into the lane leading to the farm-house, I came to the rickyard, which had, for some incomprehensible reason, been enlarged since my day. Beneath the shelter of a Dutch barn reposed a few hundredweights of hay, and a tiny tump of straw, both looking rather sodden. I was aware that the farm had been reduced in size, but the portion sold off was mainly pasture, and when I remembered that on leaving I sold about £1000 of wheat out of this rickyard alone, it seemed rather a come-down. The farm, I could see, made to-day no contribution at all towards feeding the country, and the tenant did not even grow corn enough to feed his chickens, of which a few were picking about rather disconsolately.

Farther up the lane I came to a field which I remember as the scene of what might have been a tragedy. There were a hundred ewes on it, and the lambing season was approaching, when my shepherd ran breathless into the house to say that a strange dog was worrying the ewes. I picked up my muzzle-loader from the corner of the study, where it always stood ready, and ran out and up the hill as fast as I could. I was blown when I arrived on the scene, and the shepherd was more so. A big dog was driving the ewes about the field at a furious pace. It seemed a long time before I could get near him, and then I was not very near. I gave him both barrels, and he went off howling dismally. I thought he was surely

done for, but a few days afterwards a farmer, who lived a mile or so away, called on some parish business, and as he was leaving: 'Someone,' says he, 'has been and shot my shepherd dog.' As it seemed the dog was recovering I thought it unnecessary to explain my part in the affair. Privately I wished him joy of his 'shepherd dog'!

At the end of the lane is the public-house, in friendly proximity to the church, and I find that the rectory has come up from the bottom of the hill, or rather that a new one has been built adjoining the inn and churchyard, and the old rectory degraded into a country house, assisted by paying guests. If the change was made with the intention of reviving the alliance between Bible and beer, it was foredoomed to failure. It was not the custom here, as in other localities, for the parishioners, after patronising the rector's entertainment, to visit what would elsewhere have been considered the allied establishment. This abstention had nothing to do with politics, or sobriety, or even the quality of the beer. The fact was that as all the farmers made and drank their own cider, of which the labourers could have as much as they liked—sometimes more than was good for them—no one drank or wished to drink beer.

I remember the rector in my day, an Oxford Don, and an excellent mathematician, but ignorant of agricultural affairs. He seldom spoke to anyone, and had only once been known to smile.

Returning from church one Sunday, a stray cow in front of him, whose assault he anticipated with some anxiety, a farmer from a few yards in the rear called out 'Hey, yer Reverend, be yer a drovier, hey?' A wintry smile passed over the rector's ascetic face. It was long before the chief actor in the little comedy forgot the incident. 'Old ——'s cow—her be allus a-straying—were going down the lane, same as if her'd been to church, and parson arter her; when I says, says I, "Hey, yer Reverend, be yer a drovier, hey?"'

I decide to pay my first visit to the church, which looks somehow improved in appearance, as if the proximity of the new rectory—and rector—had cheered it. I obtained the key from a decent-looking woman occupying a cottage near the church, who put me in charge of her daughter.

Here, many years ago, I used to watch the population, or a good part, 'put up its legs' when the sermon commenced, 'and think of nothing'—the quotation is not from George Elliot, as is generally supposed, but from 'The Doctor,' a publication which deserves to be better known than is the case. My little friend begins at once to tell me about the superior people with tablets on the walls. I am already acquainted with these anecdotes, and feel inclined to ask her whether the jackdaw, which used to hop about on the communion table and peck the loaves piled ready for distribution 'immediately' after service, has

left any lineal descendants. She has a 'rustic, woodland air,' and regards me with shy looks of interest. She probably enjoys her ecclesiastical duties the more that she is seldom called upon to perform them. It strikes me that another Wordsworth ought to be interviewing her.

'Sisters and brothers, little maid,' I ask her, 'how many may you be?'

She looks startled, as if she had heard an echo. If she had answered 'Seven in all' I should not have been surprised. Instead she says, 'I never had any brothers or sisters. I live in the churchyard cottage with my mother.'

Now for the inn, which I don't think I should ever have visited in the old days, so dull and uninteresting a personality was the landlord, had I not been requested, when a General Election was imminent, to solicit the innkeeper's vote and interest, as it was then the fashion to put it.

Innkeepers were then looked upon as an appanage of the Tory Party, since the great majority of the Petty Sessional Bench took that political view, and would have the power of refusing a licence to a Radical.

'I can't promise,' said the innkeeper, when I had informed him of my business. 'In fact, I want to get away from here, and am looking out for another house. If I promise there will be nothing with which to oblige a new landlord.'

I thought this reasonable, and so I told the

doddering old squire, who was a local banker and J.P. To my surprise, he said: 'It will be a very serious thing for Jones, as we'—meaning the magistrates—'could refuse a licence unless he voted right.'

'Surely,' I said, 'you wouldn't do such a thing as that!' He made no reply, and I hoped he wouldn't, but thought he would. I went back to the publican.

'I'll give *you* my word,' he said. 'It'll be all right, if only old P.'—the doddering squire—'will leave me alone. But I won't be put down as "promised."' And so I left it.

I found an improvement in the inn, and the innkeeper, though apparently there was nothing doing in the way of business. Two worn-out old men, derelict labourers I suppose, were seated disconsolately in the kitchen, without any mugs before them. The new innkeeper—not very new except to me, for he had been there for twenty years—was a fine, stalwart, soldierly-looking Salopian, aged about fifty, with a young-looking wife, who nevertheless had two married daughters, in addition to a younger one who lived at the inn. I wondered what could have brought such a man to this place, but before I left he had shown me his stud of sporting dogs, and explained that in the shooting season he was away with them a great deal, accompanying shooting parties to Scotland and other localities. The inn cost very little

to rent ; indeed, he might have bought it for a song if he had cared to. He was much interested in my account of the former prosperity of the village, and told me that several descendants of the old farmers I had known were still living from hand to mouth on the old farms, now more or less derelict. Just the sort of man I should have loved to have had there in the old days.

Near the inn was my boundary. Here is the post and rails, very rotten now, where the old mare and I nearly parted company, because I thought it was unnecessary to stick as close to hounds as was her invariable practice. She whipped round, and popped over the fence in a jiffy. If she had lost me she would have gone on contentedly by herself, thinking it served me right. Then there is another farm-house or two, after which the lane gradually dwindles, till—as they used to say in America—'it turns into a squirrel track and runs up a tree.' A bridle road, now disused, ran along the top of the farm, going out on the Ludlow road, on the far side of which were a hundred acres, once belonging to the farm, and good wheat land, but now all poor pasture.

There used to be a lot of wheat and barley grown on the far side of the bridle road. Barley has, like wheat, gone out of favour. Our barley used to be rather dark coloured, but the local maltsters liked it. There are no local maltsters now. In many villages you may still see the ruins

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of the old malthouses. The local brewers have gone too, or nearly so ; while the big brewers' agents don't attend local markets. You can travel a hundred miles now without seeing an acre of barley. This is a pity, as there is no more useful crop for farmers.

From where I am standing I can see on the adjoining hill the buildings and the long stretch of hillside belonging to a big farm held in my day by an old friend and ally, and as well farmed as any holding in the Wheatland. The tenant was a hard-working man in the prime of life, and with more scientific knowledge of his profession than was then, or I fear is now, possessed by the great majority of farmers. The farm was reached from Bridgnorth by climbing an almost inaccessible hill, and poor both as to pasture and arable land. He kept a big flock of Shropshire sheep, his chief dependence, and of which he was very proud. They were closer woolled than the ordinary Shropshires, and so better suited to withstand the wild weather they often had to encounter on their hill. His second string was wheat, to grow which the hungry soil required a good deal of assistance, and this he managed to supply. He had the advantage that in a wet or catchy season his stooks would dry a day or two before the heavier crops on the lower land. I used to look up enviously, and see him carrying wheat, while my sheaves were still soaked through.

With all his work, he found time for sport. He was a good rider and fine shot ; this it may have been that kept him going. For some years after leaving Shropshire I used to go down to see him, and found him still prosperous and contented. Some dispute with his landlord, a parson unacquainted with farming, caused him to leave. This action on the landlord's part a capable Minister of Agriculture would have made impossible. As had been prophesied, when he left everything went to pieces. It was like the breaking of the mainspring of a watch. The farm was let to people who made little or no pretence of farming, and allowed the arable land to look after itself. Cattle and sheep were taken in, when they could be got, to graze the poor pasture. These roamed all over the farm—the fences were broken down. Quickly the place went wild. There was no one to continue the work. In the vernacular, ' It wasn't everyone's job,' and with this I agreed.

Someone has taken the place now, and horses and sheep no longer stray as over a common. In fact there are none to be seen, and as the pasture is now too poor to provide cattle with anything but walking exercise sufficient to give them an appetite for food which they will never obtain, the amount of meat marketed must be small indeed, For all the good it does to anyone the place might as well run wild. It would then produce a few more blackberries than at present. Multiply the

loss of corn, sheep, and cattle once produced there by thousands, and the shortage of home-grown food is accounted for. The spiteful and senseless campaign, which the authors may now regret but the effects of which they can never undo, against everyone interested in the land, destroyed confidence, and without it who is going to spend the best years of his life struggling to wring some good by labour and foresight out of a place which, without these qualities, is but a barren hill.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SURVIVAL

THE spasmodic interest recently shown by the Government in agricultural affairs, which had been persistently neglected for forty years, has caused agricultural labourers to look forward to sharing in what is supposed to be the coming prosperity of all the classes who live by labour. They have hitherto made no move towards combination except for a short time many years ago under the leadership of Mr. Arch, whose death was announced quite a short time ago. The claim of agricultural labourers to a living wage is second to none, but caution should be used in the enforcing, since if the demands are higher than the farmers can accede to, it is the latter who will strike, or rather give up their farms. There is no trade which has a better record than that of the tiller of the soil for honesty, endurance, and good feeling towards their employers. It is too much to expect them to rest content while the wages of all other trades, not omitting barbers, are being doubled or trebled. But it is to be

hoped that for their own sakes, and that of the country, they will not make their demands too high, or agriculture, after having regained a part of what had been lost, will quickly recede into the hopeless position it has occupied for two generations. Before agricultural labourers can be paid at the rate now suggested by their advisers, it is necessary that the farmers should be fully guaranteed by the Government against loss and ruin.

I have known farm labourers in Berkshire living (?) on from 9*s.* to 12*s.* a week ; in Salop on 16*s.* or 17*s.* ; Worcestershire about the same. With the last amount labourers appeared generally contented, but it was a time when the shilling went twice as far as it does to-day. The highest of these weekly wages have been doubled during the War, and it is now suggested that they should be doubled again.

Like all affairs that have been long neglected, a sudden attempt to bring derelict land immediately into cultivation again is unlikely, for many reasons, to be permanently successful. For one reason the way to go to work is not generally known, certainly not to the class from whom agricultural dictators are likely to be selected. It could be learnt from an old farmer or an old labourer, but these consultations do not seem to have taken place. Moreover, during the long period of neglect, politicians have as much as

possible avoided the advertising of any knowledge of a degraded science—supposing them to have acquired it—which would be unlikely to lead to promotion or an increased salary. Someone must take over the job, and the best he can do is to simulate, at a moment's notice, a complete knowledge of an art which many have taken a lifetime to acquire. That some success has attended the Government's efforts during the last two years I should be the last to deny, but whether it will continue is another matter, and it looks as if the demands for excessive wages will send the newly-ploughed lands back to the state they were in before the War, and the worse instead of the better for the disturbance. It may be possible to get a crop of wheat from poor pasture that has not seen a load of manure or been properly grazed for forty years, but it will almost certainly refuse to repeat the unaccustomed effort. Perhaps the new official has heard tell of the Western Prairies, which will bear cropping for from twenty to thirty years without manure. But a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Ours is a purely agricultural village, if that term can be properly applied to a place where the fields that used to bear good crops of wheat have seeded themselves down to poor pasture. At any rate, we still possess an agricultural labourer, which is more than some of our neighbours can boast of. He is, of course, getting old, but by turning

his hands to various forms of usefulness, which there is now no one else to undertake, he still manages to make a living in what was once a prosperous community.

Looking round last Sunday, just before the commencement of Service, I saw my old friend come in quietly and take his seat in a draughty place at the back of the church, and as far as possible from the 'gentry.' He was wearing the old coat, once black but now turning green—the gift of the last vicar, which has been his best for thirty years or so, and in his hands was a Lincoln and Bennett, presented by a more recent admirer. Old Tom is the last survivor hereabouts of the old-style agricultural labourer. The last vicar, who died twenty years ago, thought a great deal of him. Both of them had seen the days of the village's prosperity, now lapsed into tradition, and had together witnessed its downfall. The present incumbent does not know what to make of Old Tom; yet it was from this class of parishioner that the successes of his predecessors were chiefly enlisted.

There are still a few people in the parish who look sturdy and honest, but Old Tom is as sturdy and as honest as he looks. There was probably more honesty, in proportion to the population, in an agricultural district than in a city, or even in a country town. It is true that honesty has not yet fallen so low but that a reputation for it is

still quite a useful commercial asset, and this fact many are shrewd enough to exploit. I should pick out Old Tom for one of the few in the village who would give his fearless, out-spoken opinion on a question of right and wrong, 'though it were to his own hindrance.' There are others who would do so in a hoarse whisper—with a hand to the mouth—'You mustn't tell as I said so.' In such a poor village, and with such small chances of a re-engagement should one's position, however humble and ill-paid, be forfeited, it requires more courage perhaps than everyone possesses—more perhaps than everyone ought to possess, when it is a question of wife and family and their bread and cheese—to attribute wrong-doing, or meanness, however obvious, to those above you. Even in classes socially superior few are found brave or self-denying enough to speak out concerning anyone who has no amusements or money to dispense, even though he may be a niggard of both, and the sycophants only slightly desirous of either.

Old Tom enjoys splendid health, and though he is halfway through the seventies he complains of no ailment but an occasional spell of rheumatism which causes him to limp, and sometimes to assist his steps on the homeward journey with a stick of such abnormal length and thickness as to suggest that it may afterwards come in useful for fuel. Rheumatism or not, it is seldom that he does not leave his little cottage soon after sunrise, to return

when that luminary is retiring behind the hill. His services are in requisition, and he need never spend an idle day. He prefers, when he can get the chance, to work by himself on 'tack work.' If he confined himself to purely agricultural labours he would often be 'kicking his heels,' as he puts it. But he can turn his hand to almost anything, and you may come upon him, miles from anywhere, seated on a bank, his feet in a dry ditch, hastily munching a crust of bread and cheese—or more likely margarine—before returning to the job which no one else could be found to see to. He is in request when the owner of one of the semi-derelict estates is clearing away brushwood, and the worthless overcrowded trees. Almost everyone has his limitations, and though more often employed at hedging than anything else, he has never acquired, nor, I should imagine, tried to acquire, the art of 'pleaching.' This, unless you are a native, you will consider strange. Yet he is thought quite a good hedger in these parts, which means that he can chop off the top of a hedge, and stuff up the gaps with brush and rubbish a little quicker than the majority. I have tried my hand at teaching him, but it was too late for him to learn. 'You want me to do it so-and-so?' 'No, I don't.' Then I would try to show him what I meant, but soon had to leave him to his own way.

Legends of the great Napoleon have somehow

reached him ; and, perhaps, for that reason, he did not greatly wonder when the big war broke out, and he heard of the Germans' intention to loot London. London, which he had never visited, is a long way off, and he would not consider that his parish had any very tempting spoil to attract raiders. He takes a weekly paper, and he has a son at the front, whose brief scrawls he painfully deciphers; but it is unlikely that he realises the scale on which battles are fought in these days, or how far-reaching are their effects. He had been more interested and more angry when told, just before the War, of the attacks that were being made on landowners and everyone connected with the land ; and—having no knowledge of politicians and their needs—he could not imagine who they were intended to benefit. He is not afraid of being without employment as long as there is any to be got on the land, but he is aware that the best labour he can give is not likely to be of much profit to his employers, and that the farmer—as he still calls himself—would be but little worse off if he were to do without it.

He can scarcely read well enough to follow the Service, parts of which would, no doubt, be quite beyond his comprehension. Not that he would object to ' dogma,' or rather that he would object to it if he knew the meaning of the word. He may even consider the Athanasian Creed a fine-sounding piece of work, and he would approve of

candles or any other ornaments on the communion table, were it not that our poverty denies us these luxuries. He probably thinks that the parson is there to put things right for him, and save him all worry about 'religion.' His attendance at church may be put down to his desire to live cleanly, and to express his agreement with the virtues which, after all, are what religion stands for. This may not be the sort of faith which goes very far towards proving the truth of a creed; but he has led a blameless life—think of it, in these days, a blameless life—and will die without fear and without regret, for he is anxious for the rest which is assured him, and of which this life has not given him much.

When the sermon is reached, I notice that he always goes off duty, so to speak. He would not dream of attempting to follow its intricacies; and as the parson crawls up the pulpit stairs, a rather puzzled look of concentration comes over his rugged features, as he settles himself more comfortably in his seat and begins—as, I am confident, though he never told me so—to think over his 'reminiscences.' True, Sunday is a day of rest with him, but he will probably not be left quite to himself and his thoughts again during the week.

He may begin by recalling his 'schooldays'—they were unworthy of this sonorous title—when he took his seat along with half a dozen others on

a rude bench in the one living-room of a thatched cottage in the little village and was instructed in the alphabet by a little old woman who eked out her fees by offering her pupils, and the public at large, penny editions of 'Jack the Giant Killer,' and other exciting tales. Almost before this educational outpost had been captured, he was engaged as 'crow-boy' on a neighbouring farm, and this, in spite of the occasional appearances and objurgations of the farmer, he found a delightful time. There are no 'crow-boys' now, and the rooks have to find a harvest elsewhere. As he grew up, he gradually learnt all the business of the farm, till one day he rose to under-wagoner on a big farm where his father was bailiff. His wages now were seventeen shillings a week—a sum whose purchasing power was more than equal to the two pounds now paid for the same work. Old Tom's father had gained his position without the small amount of instruction vouchsafed to his son. He could neither read nor write, but his education was nevertheless well suited to his circumstances. He had a wonderful memory, with which the 'three R's' had never tampered. Old Tom's memory is fairly good, only a little injured by his acquaintance with the little old woman in the thatched cottage. There are no memories now; everything must be written down in a book or on a scrap of paper. Sometimes the scrap of paper is lost—we have lately heard that it may even be torn up—

in which case there is no reliable evidence of the occurrence.

On his father's sudden death, to the great grief of his employer, the big farm was given up and Old Tom, who was then five- or six-and-twenty, had to look for a new job. He found one without difficulty; but a change was coming over agriculture on the clay. The cultivation of wheat was being discontinued, though there was no other crop equally suitable to the stiff soil. Instead of the various and interesting labours of an arable farm, he had to come down gradually to gathering a little hay on poor pasture, which yearly got poorer, and looking after sheep with which previously he had had little or nothing to do.

Up to this period he has not found these memories disagreeable. He has a right to feel some honest pride in the knowledge that he did his best as a fighter in the only troop in which he was enrolled, and he may feel, as greater men have felt before him, that ' 'Tis better to have fought and lost than never to have fought at all.' He has heard of the Government's sudden interest in agriculture, but it is no wonder that he does not feel very sanguine as to the result. On his way to work he passes a small estate adjoining the road, on which good wheat crops used to be grown, but which has for many years been poor pasture, yielding in favourable seasons a few hundredweights of inferior hay, which he has occasionally assisted

to carry. Last year, to his astonishment, part of a big field was ploughed up and sown with oats at the end of May. These did not come up except in patches here and there. The tenant started to plough again, but his steam-plough broke down, and stood idle in the field for months. The field now presents a lamentable appearance, and from its position affords amusement to all strangers passing by, while it is a source of shame to ourselves.

This, and other rumours, deprive him of the pleasure of looking forward with any confidence to a day when the lost cause will come to the front again, with better generals if not a sturdier rank and file. But it is only when his thoughts go back to some things the country has lost that he feels a turn towards melancholy.

Foremost among these is the ploughboy's whistle, never to be heard again ; the swish of the broad hook, and the happy well-paid reaper who wielded it ; the wheat-carrying at high pressure on fields where not a sheaf has been harvested for a generation ; the now obsolete tap-tapping of the flail on the barn floor, continued long after the arrival of the useful but rather wasteful steam thrasher, when on a wet day the men had a snug job in the barn at thrashing a few bags of wheat to be afterwards ground at the mill ; the shepherd's crook, seldom seen now save when a high-church parson, in a many-buttoned cassock, carries a

brand new one when visiting his flock ; the ' stepping stones,' of which there were many miles, edging the wheat-fields, but now overgrown with rubbish, or removed to make paths in the gardens of the new ' manor houses.' By these stones he had wandered on Good Friday, and on many a summer evening, with the blue-eyed girl who is now the ' old 'oman.' ' God bless her ! ' he says to himself ; ' if it 'adn't a been for her it 'ud been a hard life.'

If the sermon should happen to be a long one, he may have a little time left for wondering why this industry of agriculture, so necessary not only to the village, but, as he has learnt, also to the Empire, should have been permitted to fall so low that it is considered a sign of folly or incompetence to engage in it. Why is it, he may inquire, that more and more people are waxing rich in London and in the big towns, while no one can earn a living in the country. The village in which he lives is on a road greatly favoured by motorists, and it surprised him, before the War put a period, temporarily, to their pursuit of pleasure, to see more and more people with plenty of money to spend on amusing themselves, while the country was going to ruin. There must be something wrong somewhere. He did not grudge these folk their enjoyment, or what they considered such, though the dust, when there was a slight breeze in summer, would settle down on the

village like a dusky pall, ruin his garden, and greatly aggravate the asthma from which his old wife was a constant sufferer. In his early days people used to stop at home, and look after their business ; later, they wanted to get away as quickly and as often as possible, and Old Tom, who is nothing if not charitable, allows that there would have been very little for them to do if they had stayed there.

But the parson has finished, and Old Tom goes home to dinner, or, if it is an evening Service, to bed, and defers the continuation of his reminiscences, or whatever he may call them, for seven days.

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